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# THE STRUGGLE FOR FRENCH DEMOCRACY

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# THE STRUGGLE FOR FRENCH DEMOCRACY

CYRIL CLAYDON

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# PREFACE

THE title *The Struggle for French Democracy* indicates the purpose of this book. It is, briefly, to show how, despite many setbacks, and in the most varying historical circumstances, the French people have, during the past hundred and fifty years, waged a continuous struggle for social advance and for a more democratic way of life. Or in other words, to show how the French people, through the liberation movement of to-day, are carrying forward the banner of the champions of democracy of 1789, 1848, 1871 and 1936.

It is hardly possible for us to appraise the significance of current events in France to-day, the unity that has been achieved by the French people in the liberation struggle, the determination of Frenchmen to purge their country of traitors, their desire for far-reaching social changes, unless we also know something of the social and political development of recent times.

As this book attempts to deal with both past and present, it has not been possible to go into detail about any aspect of French history. Nor have I attempted to bring the book right up to the final date of going to press. If the final chapter of the book, as is most likely, is to some degree outdated by the progress of events before it even reaches the bookshops, it is hoped that nevertheless it will help the reader to understand better the development of events and above all the need for the closest and most friendly relations with our ally, France.

# CHAPTER I

## FRANCE, HER PEOPLE, AND THE WORLD

TODAY, when the liberation of Europe has begun, few questions can be of greater concern to the British people than that of the future of France, our neighbour country, the largest and in many ways most politically important of all the lands occupied by the Nazis in the course of this war.

Along what paths will France develop in the future? What role can France play in world reconstruction after the war? What effect would the existence of a democratic or even of a socialist France have on us, the British people? To what extent is the future of France our concern?

The first of these questions and to a very large extent the second also must be decided first and foremost by the French people themselves. Yet the extent to which, and the speed with which the French people will be able freely to tackle the problems of their country's future, will depend very much on what the British people, and particularly British workers, think and do about it.

It will help us to solve this problem correctly, if we know something of the French people, of their country, their way of life, and their political traditions, the history of France and the forces within French life which have shaped her history—the forces which brought shame and catastrophe on France in 1940 and those other forces which are today restoring the honour of France, and may be the means whereby a glorious future is assured to her people.

### *The "French Character"*

Some people try to interpret French political life on the basis of what they consider to be the French national character. At the time of the fall of France a number of British newspapers tried to explain this event as the outcome of certain weaknesses in the national character of France, despite the fact that many Frenchmen fought heroically to the last and that

the actual capitulation was carried out not by the French people as a whole but by a handful of traitors who, for reasons we shall later examine, had great power concentrated in their hands. And this was no new type of argument. It had for a long time been suggested by historians that France had had four revolutions during the past 150 years and that French government during recent years had been apparently unstable only because of the "mercurial" and fickle character of the Frenchmen.

The belief that French political life can be interpreted in terms of national character, though widespread, can provide no satisfactory solution for a number of reasons.

First, although it cannot be denied that French people have a character of their own, it is very difficult to define this with any degree of precision, and it is even more difficult to trace its connection with the political development of France.

Second, the characteristics of the French people are not static but are the product of a very rich and complex historical development. They are changing all the time, they are not the same as they were yesterday, and we may be sure that the French nation of tomorrow, steeled and tested in years of hard struggles against the most ruthless enemy of all history, will be socially, politically, and in outlook and way of life a very different nation from that which existed in 1939–40.

Third, while certain characteristics may be attributed to Frenchmen as a whole, they do not apply to all French individuals to the same degree, but differ according to region, class, upbringing, etc.—as the Englishman may find, who bases his belief that all Frenchmen are excitable on his experience of a few Paris taxidrivers.

Finally, it may be noted that Marshal Pétain used precisely this argument about the French character in order to transfer responsibility for the capitulation from the handful of traitors who really are responsible to the French people as a whole. In announcing the armistice he attributed France's military weakness to that fact that the French people had been too pleasure-loving, indolent and immoral, and had had too few children.

In fact, anyone who tries to think seriously about the problem must realise that in order to understand French politics and the problems of the future of France it is not enough to interpret the character of the French people, but that in addition it is necessary to examine from all aspects geographical, economic, social, political, and cultural, the environment in which the French people have grown up and the civilisation which they have built.

While it is not possible to do this exhaustively in the present book, certain essential features can be presented which will help to bring our minds closer to the realities of the life and struggles of the French people.

## *The Land of France*

Many people generalise about France from a few scraps of knowledge picked up from the press or from short visits made before the war to parts of France, for instance to Normandy or Paris. They then tend to think that what is true of Paris or Normandy in terms of geography, the way the people live, and their political opinions is necessarily true of the whole of France. And, of course, the majority of English people could not afford to go to France at all before the war.

It is therefore necessary, for a start, that we should appreciate the great diversity of geographical and climatic conditions and of natural resources that exist within France.

While large areas in the North are vast unbroken tracts of fertile plainland, a very large part of France, including the great Central Massif, the French Alps, the Jura and the Pyrenees, is mountainous country unlike anything which exists in Britain.

And whilst, in the extreme South of France, along the Mediterranean coast, winters are mild and warm, and there are places where it hardly ever snows, there are other places, in the most continental part of France, close to the Swiss frontier, where there may be in winter as much as forty degrees of frost. As M. P. Maillaud says in his recent book on France, the " wintersports fans may open the ski-ing season in Megere

when the last bathers begin to shiver on the beach of St. Tropez."

And while crops grown by our own farmers—apples, wheat, barley, sugar beet—are grown throughout the North of France, the vine, the olive, and even oranges grow on the sun-baked slopes of the centre and south.

### *Is there a French Race?*

Just as France is diverse from a geographical point of view, so the French people are by no means racially homogenous.

French people living near the borders of Belgium, Spain and Italy are in many cases racially more similar to their friends over the frontier than they are to their compatriots at the opposite end of the country. The natives of Brittany are akin to the country folk of Cornwall, and the people who live in the extreme south west of France, between the Garonne and the Pyrenees, are akin to those of the Basque country in the north of Spain, while both the Bretons and the French Basques preserve their own ancient tongues which are very unlike French.

### *The Economic Development of France*

There is a corresponding if not so great diversity in the degree of economic and social development of France.

Thus travellers in pre-war France may have noticed the difference between various regions of France—while one area of France might look outwardly prosperous, with smart newly built towns and villages and concrete roads, another region would be filled with shabby and aged towns and villages traversed by badly repaired cobbled roads (though of course the real prosperity or otherwise of the people did not necessarily correspond to superficial appearances). And while many parts of the French countryside are divided into small-holdings cultivated by peasant farmers with fairly out-of-date means of production, there are whole regions of France, particularly around Paris, where most of the land forms part of big farms

of many thousand acres, cultivated by hired labourers and employing advanced technical methods.

Similarly in industry, while in the more backward parts of France industrial production is carried on almost entirely in very small workshops, often owned and worked by the same man, or employing only a handful of workers, there are other parts of France, such as the Seine region outside Paris, and Alsace and north-eastern France, where big modern industrial concerns employing hundreds and thousands of workers dominate the life of the people.

There are of course other districts where neither big industry nor small industry predominates but where both are more or less equally important from the point of view of the number of people engaged in them.

But despite this great diversity it is possible for us to distinguish certain features typical of French economic life as a whole compared with that of other countries.

*The key point to be understood when comparing French economic life to that of any other advanced capitalist state is that agriculture today still plays a role in French economy no less important than that of industry.*

Before the war the total agricultural output of France was greater that that of Britain or Germany. Thus unlike Britain or Germany, which have to import food in order to feed their peoples, France grows more than enough for her own needs. The French people in the years between 1918 and 1939 consumed on an average 88 million quintals of wheat in a year. And in a year of good harvest, for instance 1933, no less than 105 million quintals of wheat were grown by French farmers. And only in the few years following the first World War, when many regions had been devastated, did France fail to grow enough wheat to meet the needs of her people.

Corresponding to this, France is less industrially developed than some other countries. In the years before 1939 French industrial output was lower than that of Britain, Germany, the United States, and the Soviet Union. The steel output of French industry for 1929 was 9.7 million tons as against 16.2

million tons for Germany. The output of coal in four leading industrial countries in 1929 was :

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| United States | .. | 552 | million tons |
| Great Britain | .. | 262 | ,, ,, |
| Germany .. | .. | 163.4 | ,, ,, |
| France .. | .. | 53.8 | ,, ,, [1] |

French industry before the war was characterised by the existence of a number of very large industrial concerns side by side with many very small workshops, either one-man concerns or worked by a very few men. In 1926 there were in France 13,909 concerns employing over 50 workers, and 362 employing over 1,000 each. And these big concerns, because of their mechanisation and scientific organisation, were able to produce a considerable proportion of France's total industrial output. Of the small concerns there were about 1,400,000, each producing only insignificant quantities of goods but important from the point of view of the number of people engaged in them.

The relative backwardness of industry of course had its effect on French agriculture which does not produce so much in all as Canada or the USSR. For whereas in both these countries mainly large-scale farming with mechanised equipment is carried on, France is still mainly a country of small peasant farmers. Thus Canada with a much smaller population produces much larger quantities of wheat than does France.

The predominant position of agriculture has been stressed as this has very greatly affected the whole history and life of the French people, and has remained important up to the present time. No discussion of the future of France can lead to correct conclusions unless this is taken into account. Throughout the nineteenth century the vast majority of French people lived on the land. In recent years, with further industrialisation, the population of the countryside has been about equal to that of the towns.

[1] Varga and Mendelsohn, *New Data for Lenin's Imperialism*, Lawrence & Wishart

*How do the French People Live ?*

This highly agricultural aspect of France has of course affected the French way of life. R. L. Ritchie, in his *Companion to French Studies*, makes the following comment :

> The urban population has never quite lost touch with the country—even the most typical Parisian usually turns out to have farmer relatives, and the habit of spending part of his holidays in some ancestral and rustic *pays*.

While this comment is somewhat misleading in that the French worker has in some cases almost lost touch with the countryside (and apart from the brief period of the Popular Front has not enjoyed yearly holidays), it is true that nearly all French townsmen have relatives in the country with whom they have some sort of contact, that most French workers are either the sons or grandsons of peasants, and that their outlook has at least until recently been influenced by their origin.

Dividing the French people according to social stratification we get the following picture of pre-1939 France.

Out of a total " active " population (that is breadwinners) of 21,000,000 people (out of a total population of 40,000,000) there were :

8,000,000 peasants
6,000,000 industrial workers
800,000 clerical workers
700,000 domestic servants

There were also large numbers of professional people, barristers, doctors, etc., and of small shopkeepers, small traders and owners of small workshops, all of whom, together with a large section of the peasantry, can be counted as the French middle class.

Finally there was the *grande bourgeoisie* (the capitalist class in the sense of the rich owners of big factories, banks, and large landed estates) which consisted of about 10,000 people.

It has often been said that France is a nation of small

capitalists. But for a clear understanding of French national life it is necessary to distinguish between the capitalist class and the middle class or petty bourgeoisie. Whereas the former live purely and simply by virtue of their ownership of the means of production, the latter live partly or wholly by their personal labour, and, as we shall see later on, suffer in many ways at the hands of the big bourgeoisie. Therefore, although it is true that enormous numbers of middle-class people in France before the war were small investors (from 8 to 10 million Frenchmen held small amounts of stock, for the most part government shares or government-guaranteed stock), these people cannot be classed as capitalists, as the shares which they held were certainly not their primary source of income, but were rather the form in which they kept their savings, and in their capacity as small shopkeepers, peasants, professional people and skilled workers, all of them had their own class interests, quite distinct from those of the big bourgeoisie.

The big bourgeoisie on the other hand lived by owning big landed estates farmed by hired labourers or rented out to small peasant holders, or by the possession of large blocks of shares in one or more, often a number, of big industrial concerns or banks, which in their turn derived their wealth, not only from the exploitation of the proletariat, but also to a large extent from the accumulated millions of the savings and small investments of the middle class particularly the peasantry, and from interest on capital invested in foreign countries or in the French Empire. In terms of wealth, the capitalist class, as described above, is roughly equivalent to those Frenchmen who enjoy incomes of over 5,000,000 francs (that is, £67,000 at pre-war value) per annum.

This tiny section of the people concentrated an enormous proportion of the wealth of France in its hands (and still does to-day insofar as the Nazis have left untouched any of the wealth of France).

Further inequalities in the division of wealth among French people are shown by the following table, taken from official statistics compiled in connection with death duties.

Out of every thousand Frenchmen who died in a particular year in the nineteen thirties :

355 left no property at all
160 ,, less than 2,000 francs (£27 at pre-1939 value)
190 ,, 2,000 to 10,000 francs (£27 to £135)
210 ,, 10,000 to 50,000 (£135 to £675)
70 ,, 50,000 to 250,000 (£675 to £3,375)
15 ,, 250,000 and over (£3,375 and over)

thus roughly one Frenchman out of every three was completely proletarianised, that is to say, he had no appreciable property of his own. This Frenchman was either an unskilled worker or a farm labourer. One Frenchman out of every three had a very small amount of property, equal to anything up to £135, and was probably a skilled worker or small shopkeeper or small peasant owner. On the other hand, one Frenchman in every four was comfortably off (with property of between £135 and £675), and was probably a somewhat more successful shopkeeper or peasant or a member of the professional classes. Finally, one Frenchman in every ten was well off in the sense that he possessed property to the value of over £675 (pre-war value), and even within the income group to which this Frenchman belonged there were vast differences of income, between the well-off middle-class people and the big bourgeoisie, with its average property of over £67,000[1] and its multimillionaire owners of the big trusts.

There is your nation of small capitalists !

Of course, it is not possible to draw sweeping conclusions about the standard of living of the main classes of French society from the figures just quoted. In the first place, these do not represent classes as such, but income groups. In practice the income groups of the working class and the middle class overlap. Thus for instance the income of a skilled factory worker might be higher than that of a poor peasant, who would formally speaking be a member of the middle class. There-

[1] The above figures and tables are quoted by Maurice Thorez in his book *France Today and the People's Front.*

fore it is necessary to say a few words about each class separately.

*The Peasantry.* This word is loosely used to denote all those who get their living from the land. A French dictionary defines peasant as " man, woman of the country ". Thus the peasantry includes various social strata. These are :

1. The peasant owner, who owns and works his own strip of land of varying size. He is nearly always helped by his family and sometimes by one or two hired labourers. Some peasants who do not normally hire labour take on additional help, if they can get it, at harvest time.

2. The tenant farmer, who rents a strip of land, but otherwise lives in the same way as the peasant owner.

3. The *metayer*—another type of peasant farmer—who also rents land, but pays the rent wholly or partly by giving over to his landlord an agreed share of his produce. There are many different systems of *metayage* in use in different parts of France, but all are variations on this basic principle.

There were before the war four million peasant owners and 1,300,000 tenant farmers and *metayers.*

The population of the countryside also included 2,700,000 wage labourers, some of whom worked for the better-off peasants and some of whom worked on the estates of the big capitalist landlords.

What of the standard of life of the French peasantry? Much has been said about the healthy peasant life and all its advantages : that the peasants are able to produce for themselves many necessities of life, food, timber, and sometimes articles of clothing, and that they enjoy property and independence. In actual fact, the French peasantry even in the most prosperous years before the war, though they may have got some advantages from their rural mode of life, enjoyed by no means idyllic conditions. Many parts of the French countryside lack the amenities which English town-dwellers often take for granted, such as gas and water supplies, sanitation, and good roads and railways. Vast numbers of peasants were burdened with heavy debts and taxation, and were in constant fear of a too good harvest, which would force down

the price of their crops, or make it impossible for them to sell their produce at all.

While every peasant owner may have cherished hopes of attaining wealth and security, by hard work and the extension of his land, or by somehow winning a fortune from his small investments, there was in actual practice a very definite limit to the prosperity which could be attained by the mass of the peasants in the conditions of pre-war France, first, because the very nature of peasant economy, that is to say, the separate unplanned cultivation of hundreds of thousands of small strips of land, precluded the proper application of modern machinery and scientific methods of agriculture ; and secondly, because there were (and still are) vast inequalities in the ownership of land, as a result of which a large part of the agricultural land of France is owned by a very few big landowners while millions of peasants have scarcely enough land to enable them to make a living. This is shown by the following table (representing the position during a typical year between 1918 and 1939) :

| *Number of holdings* | *Per cent. of total* | *Size of holding* |
|---|---|---|
| 100,000 | 2 | over 40 hectares[1] |
| 700,000 | 13 | 10 to 40 ,, |
| 2,500,000 | 85 | 1 to 10 ,, |
| 2,200,000 | | less than 1 hectare |

As for the agricultural wage labourers, they had before the war the lowest standard of living of any section of the French community (apart from the unemployed). Their wages were lower than those of the most unskilled workers in other trades. For instance (according to Neil Hunter's *Crisis and Peasantry in France*) the wages of agricultural workers in a representative French village were found to be lower than those of a building labourer, or a factory worker, and only half those of a postman living in the same village. The housing and general conditions of life of agricultural labourers (according to the same authority) were very often abominable, and in some cases labourers had to sleep in barns and outhouses along with the cattle.

[1] 1 hectare = 2.471 acres.

*Industrial Workers.* French industrial workers can be divided into three categories : those who worked for themselves, that is, independent artisans ; those who worked in small concerns employing a handful of men ; and those who worked in larger concerns employing over 50 and in some cases hundreds and thousands of men. The number who belonged to the first and second categories was very large, as can be deduced from the fact, quoted previously, that there were over 1,300,000 small concerns employing less than 50 workers. The independent workers enjoyed some of the same advantages, and suffered some of the same disadvantages as the peasant owner. In pre-war France the independent worker was more insecure than the peasant because of the competition of big industry. Of the wage workers, those who worked in small concerns were worse off in respect of both wages and hours and conditions of work than those who worked in big factories as the latter were more highly organised and were able to improve their wages and conditions by trade union action. And, in fact, during the time the Popular Front Government was in power in France (1936-7) the French workers won by strike action and with the help of a progressive government, conditions and hours of work that were on the whole better than those of the English workers. And though it would be wrong to conclude that the conditions of the French workers as a whole were not always in some respects very bad, it has been estimated by Kuczynski in his survey *Labour Conditions in Western Europe* that :

> Absolute labour conditions (that is, taking all factors into account, hours and intensity of work, housing, travelling, real wages, etc.) of the French worker were probably never quite so bad as those of the English or German worker.

Unemployment among French workers seems not to have been so bad during this period as among English workers. In 1930 there were 150,000 and in 1935 500,000 registered unemployed, but these figures were by no means complete, as many categories of unemployed (for instance, those owning their own plot of ground) were excluded from benefit and therefore did

not come into the register. Thus Maurice Thorez estimates that the real figure for unemployment in 1935 was more like 1,500,000. (This may be compared with the figure of 2,700,000 unemployed in Britain in 1933.) And those that were unemployed were even worse off than British unemployed as there was no state system of benefit, and only small allowances were made by the municipalities to those completely destitute.

*The Middle-Class Townspeople.* The small shopkeepers and professional people, while enjoying a higher standard of living than the worker and a number of advantages not available to the peasantry, suffered from the same insecurity as the latter.

One or two general details about French conditions of life will help the reader to make a better comparison with the situation in England before the war.

French conditions of life were perhaps better than ours in the following sense. Fewer Frenchmen than Englishmen live in towns, and so France does not suffer to the same degree from overcrowding, slums, smoky atmosphere, adulterated foods, etc., all of which seem to be the inevitable consequences of industrial town life in capitalist countries. Furthermore, there were no large derelict industrial areas in France as in England after 1918.

On the other hand the standard of life of the French people as a whole was considerably lower than our own in many respects. Although there were few enormous slum areas in France comparable with those in London or Glasgow, housing conditions on the whole were probably worse than those in England. The French people were as a whole worse off than us with regard to industrial goods of all kinds as well as sanitation, water supplies, health services, and even education. And while France of the Third Republic boasted of a well-developed system of higher education, children were permitted to leave school at the age of 12.

Thus taking all factors into consideration the standard of life of the French people was probably somewhat lower than that of the people of England and Wales. This is suggested by the fact that during the last hundred years, and in fact right up to the present day, the average expectation of life in England

and Wales, 1930, for instance, was 58.7 years, whereas the figure for France in the same year was 54.3.[1] The table of infant mortality rates tells the same tale. Here for instance are the figures for 1931–5 (which were years of economic crisis for both countries) :

| | *Deaths per thousand under 1 year* | |
|---|---|---|
| | *England and Wales* | *France* |
| 1931 | 66 | 76 |
| 1932 | 65 | 77 |
| 1933 | 64 | 75 |
| 1934 | 59 | 69 |
| 1935 | 57 | 69 |

But the standard of life of the French people, as of the British, did not stand still between the two wars. During the economic crisis of 1930–5 the standard of living of the workers and the middle class as a whole fell sharply. Wages fell, unemployment increased, small shopkeepers were unable to sell their goods, the peasantry were impoverished by the fall in the price of grain. On the other hand, during 1936 and the first half of 1937 the standard of living rose to some extent for the whole of the working class and for sections of the middle class, as a result of the struggles of the people united together in the People's Front. From the beginning of 1938, as a result of the weakening of the Popular Front, the people again gradually lost the advantages of the previous period.

This brief survey of how the French people lived before the war will help to show us the kind of material problems with which the French people were faced. Many of these—unemployment, bad housing, infant mortality, inadequate education, low wages for the workers, insecurity for the middle class—are similar to the problems of our own people.

Of course such problems as these were made a hundred times more acute by military defeat and occupation, and many new trials were added. Many hundreds of thousands of Frenchmen have been working 14 hours a day in factories in Germany and other parts of Europe under conditions of

[1] *Bulletin de la Statistique Générale de la France*, 1935.

complete slavery. Many men and women taking part in the resistance have been living in the *maquis*, that is to say, in the mountains, forests, and open countryside, cut off from their families and without regular food or shelter. Hundreds of thousands of children and young people have starved, and have been condemned to a slow death by tuberculosis. And, as we shall see, France has been terribly weakened both in man and in machine power, and her standard of living has been undermined for years to come.

### *France's Role in the World*

What contribution has France made in the past to the civilisation which we are defending today?

Although modern France is characterised by industrial backwardness, during the seventeenth, eighteenth, and the first half of the nineteenth century France led Europe in material development. France was also the leader of Europe in a cultural sense. The French language, French literature, French civilisation as a whole were admired by cultured people throughout the world and aped by the ruling class of every country in Europe.

In the words of Ilya Ehrenburg, the author of *The Fall of Paris* :

> It is impossible to think of world culture without France. French science was one of the foundations of human thought. Racine and Molière, Condillac and Stendhal, Hugo and Baudelaire are all names near and dear to nations throughout the world. In Paris painters of all countries learnt a sense of proportion.

We can be confident that a nation which has made such a distinguished contribution to the past of mankind has as great a part to play in the years to come.

## CHAPTER II

### THE GREAT REVOLUTION AND THE RISE OF THE FRENCH WORKING CLASS

THE eighteenth century was a time of great material development for France. Since the death of Louis XIV French industry and commerce had grown steadily. On the outskirts of many towns new industries had grown up, and mechanical improvements, some imported from England and others invented by Frenchmen, were introduced in the newly-built workshops. On the land also, new crops, new methods of cultivation had been introduced on the big estates of the more progressive nobles and on the lands recently acquired by some of the big bourgeoisie. The banks were expanding both in wealth and in the range of their activities.

Thus the new middle class, the bourgeoisie, was growing richer and more numerous every day and was absorbing those sections of the old nobility which had not lost their vitality. This bourgeoisie prided itself on being the most vigorous, most enterprising and most cultured class of the time. It was the class which provided France with the outstanding writers, thinkers, scientists who made eighteenth-century France renowned throughout the world.

But the trade and industry and therefore also the wealth and power of the bourgeoisie was intolerably restricted by the survivals of feudal economy and by the state organisation and privileges of the feudal nobility, which in France of that time was still the ruling class. Technical advances were directly hindered by the burden of taxation. The growth of manufacture was impeded by the monopolies, regulations and restrictions of the guilds artificially maintained by the feudal state. Trade was held up by the absurd agglomeration of local tariff barriers. Furthermore, the majority of the bourgeoisie was embittered by the concentration of power and privilege in the hands of an effete, parasitic nobility.

Not only the bourgeoisie, but all sections of the people except for a small minority of feudal landowners, wealthy bishops, favoured merchants and financiers with a stake in the *ancien régime*, regarded with growing hatred a system which both imposed material burdens upon them and gave them no possibility within its framework of redressing their wrongs. In particular the peasantry, the vast mass of the nation, struggling for existence, burdened with labour service and crushed by taxation, longed for changes.

This was the situation in which the Revolution took place.

### *The character of the Revolution of* 1789

The French Revolution was essentially a bourgeois revolution. Its aim was to destroy the feudal system and the feudal state which had become a barrier to the development of industry and trade and of the capitalist economic system, and to establish the political rule of the bourgeoisie. And this revolution which was led and inspired by the politicians and thinkers of the bourgeois class, was carried through by the mass of the French people, the peasantry and the small shopkeepers and artisans of the towns, who like the bourgeoisie had been oppressed by the old regime, and stood to gain from its overthrow.

The character of the Great Revolution of 1789 is indicated by the following:

*First, it thoroughly destroyed the remnants of the feudal economic relationships in town and country, and in their place legalised and extended bourgeois relationships, bourgeois forms of property.* This fact is clearly enunciated in the law of 1793 which sums up four years of profound revolutionary transformation, during which one after another the rights and privileges of the feudal nobility were destroyed. The final decree of the national Convention on feudal rights ran as follows:

> Wednesday, 17th July, 1793, the second year of the French Republic one and indivisible.

All former seigneurial rights, fixed or casual feudal rights, even those retained by the decree of August 25th last, are suppressed without compensation.

Excepted from the operation of the previous clause are those charges and rents which are purely land rents and not feudal.

Thus in the place of feudal property bourgeois property was everywhere established. Alongside bourgeois landowners employing wage labour and renting out their land, were established hundreds of thousands of free peasant proprietors (previously bound in varying degree to the feudal lords) producing, according to the practice of capitalist economy, for the free market.

The Revolution gave a great impetus to industry and commerce. Throughout the revolutionary period, despite all changes of government, merchants, financiers and war-contractors made what were for those times tremendous profits. During the Napoleonic regime, which consolidated what the more democratic phase of the movement in 1789–94 had begun, the elimination of competition from British goods through the blockade, the conquest of new markets in Europe, the stimulus of the Imperial wars and the direct encouragement given to every technical and scientific advance, all helped to bring about a great expansion of industry and commerce.

*Secondly, the feudal state was destroyed and a bourgeois state was built up in its place.* The revolutionary changes of 1789–94—the overthrow of the first National Assembly and the establishment of the Convention, the further revolt of the people of Paris which led to the setting up of the Committee of Public Safety, and the emergence during these years of a powerful organised democratic movement of the people exercising increasing control over the government itself—these events brought about the complete destruction of the old feudal organs of government. And though the popular forms of rule of '93 were crushed by the reaction of 1795, the subsequent governments, and particularly the rule of

Napoleon, built up in place of what had been destroyed a strong centralised state such as was needed for the consolidation of the power of the bourgeoisie, and a Code of Laws which, of all the legal systems in the world, is the most perfect expression of bourgeois property relationships.

*The theories, slogans, ideas in the name of which the Revolution was fought out also reflected its bourgeois character.* Those who made the tremendous transformation, who saw the blinding contrast between the old tyranny they had overthrown and the new era which they ushered in, thought that they were acting according to the principles of eternal truth, reason and justice, which for the first time in world history had been grasped by the Frenchmen of 1789. But in actual fact, as Engels remarks in *Anti-Duhring*: "the kingdom of reason was nothing but the idealised kingdom of the bourgeoisie." The Declaration of the Rights of Man adopted by the French revolutionaries laid down certain "natural, imprescriptible and inalienable rights" for which they were fighting, such as Liberty, Property, Security, and Resistance to Oppression. It has become clear since that time that far from being general unconditional rights to be enjoyed equally by all members of society, these rights expressed the very specific and conditional aims which the bourgeoisie of the time were trying to win for themselves—*Liberty* of trade, commerce and manufacture as opposed to feudal restriction of these; *Property* in the sense primarily of private capitalist ownership of the land and of the means of production; *Security* for this private ownership and for the rule of the bourgeoisie and *Resistance to feudal Oppression*, which would if restored deprive the bourgeoisie of the advantages which it had won. The right to (bourgeois) property—"sacred and inviolable"—was never seriously challenged by any of the main pre-revolutionary thinkers—Voltaire, Rousseau, Diderot, Montesquieu—nor by the leaders of the revolution. Robespierre, for instance, represented the Parisian lower middle class, and his policy came into conflict with the interests of the big bourgeoisie; yet he publicly upheld the right to bourgeois property and private enterprise.

Thus the Revolution of 1789 was in no sense a socialist revolution. It could not have been. There was hardly any industrial proletariat in France at the time, and the masses who took part in the revolution and in 1793 pushed it farthest to the Left, and provided the social basis for the Committee of Public Safety, were not proletarians but were mostly independent artisans or small shopkeepers. In fact, throughout the Revolution workers' trade unions were forbidden by the notorious *Loi Chapelier* of 1791, one clause of which runs:

> All large meetings of artisans, workers, journeymen, instigated by them against the freedom of labouring are to be considered seditious and punished as such.

All attempts by the lower classes to take the Revolution beyond the aims for which the bourgeoisie fought were finally suppressed exactly as all attempts by Royalists during the same period to re-establish the old order were likewise suppressed. In order to encompass the destruction of feudalism and in order to defend France against attempts from abroad to restore the old order by invasion, it was necessary to draw all sections of the common people into political life. But once the enemy of the bourgeoisie—feudalism—had been smashed, and when the petty-bourgeoisie tried to establish their own power through the Committee of Public Safety and Robespierre, the bourgeoisie through its control of the high command of the army, carried through the reaction of Thermidor, guillotined Robespierre and many of his followers, and paved the way for the rule of Napoleon.

But 1789 was a great progressive step forward for France and for mankind. It was of great significance for the future of France because it made possible the development of France as an industrial capitalist country. For the largest section of the French people, the peasantry, it was of great immediate benefit, as it gave them land of their own freed from feudal exactions, and in place of the previous bare existence, enabled many of them to enjoy for some decades a modest prosperity.

The Revolution was of great significance for Europe because

France became the first big country on the continent of Europe in which feudalism was overthrown. The Revolution and the Napoleonic wars shook feudalism throughout Europe, and raised high hopes of liberation in the minds of the peoples of Europe.

Further, the French Revolution is of great historical significance because during its course the very widest masses of the people of France were drawn into political life on a scale never known before in the history of that country or of the world. The pressure of the masses of the people in this revolution was necessary and instrumental in bringing about every one of the acts which destroyed feudalism. The people of Paris stormed the Bastille. The people of Paris brought back a dilatory National Assembly from Versailles to take its decisions in the capital where they could bend it to their will. The mass of the peasantry declared their refusal to pay feudal dues or to meet feudal obligations to their lords, and took up arms to ensure respect for their decisions. Then, and only then, the National Assembly decreed the abolition of tithes and privileges which had already been in fact abolished. The people of France built the army which amazed the world by its resistance to foreign invasion in defence of the revolution it had made.

Lastly, the French Revolution is of great historical significance because, in order to carry it through, the French bourgeoisie had to work out their ideology in its most revolutionary and most consistent form. As Engels said:

> The great men who in France were clearing the minds of men for the coming revolution themselves acted in an extremely revolutionary fashion. They recognised no external authority of any kind. Religion, conceptions of nature, society, political systems, everything was subjected to the most merciless criticism; everything had to justify its existence at the bar of reason or renounce all claim to existence. . . . Now for the first time appeared the light of day; henceforth superstition, injustice, privilege and oppression were to be superseded by eternal truth, eternal

justice, equality grounded in Nature and the inalienable rights of man.[1]

This clear and consistent formulation of bourgeois revolutionary ideals, these slogans and ideas of the time have had a profound effect on progressive thought in all countries ever since.

These are some of the reasons why progressive Frenchmen ever since 1789 have continued to evoke the ideals and slogans of 1789, why Vichy has attempted (in vain) to erase the words *Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité*—the slogan of the Revolution—from the memory of the people, why Frenchmen fighting for the freedom of their country today have these same words on their lips, and why the French workers, and in particular the communists of France, regard themselves as the true sons and heirs of the traditions of 1789.

## *The Events of* 1814–71

In 1814, following the defeat of Napoleon, his banishment, and the treaty of Paris imposed on France by the Allies—Britain, Prussia and Austria—Louis XVIII, the "legitimate heir to the throne" was made King of France. This was a restoration of the monarchy but was not a restoration of feudalism. Bourgeois property was in every way respected by the new monarch. The rich bourgeoisie who had acquired land confiscated from the nobility and the Church during the Revolution kept their land. The manufacturers continued to enjoy the rights of free enterprise. The peasantry, in the vast majority of cases, also kept their land. The bourgeois state built up by Napoleon remained, together with its Code of Law.

What was changed? A very much depleted nobility returned. Some land was given to it, partly at the expense of a section of the peasantry.[2] The former feudal lords became bourgeois landowners, renting out their land or employing wage labour. With the trappings of a Monarch and his

[1] *Anti-Duhring*, Lawrence & Wishart, pp. 23–4.

[2] A reign of terror was instituted against sections of the peasantry in some parts of France, and they were dispossessed of their land.

Court, and the fiction of "granting a constitution" to the bourgeoisie, an attempt was made to restore the tarnished legend of the Bourbons.

In order to follow the story of the French people through the next half century, it is necessary to note that while the bourgeois revolution had been achieved in France, there was no industrial revolution as in England of the same period, that no big industrial development took place in France until the 1850's and that when it did take place it was not on a scale comparable to the industrialisation of Britain.

Thus France at the beginning of the nineteenth century was still very largely an agrarian country. J. H. Clapham estimates that in 1801 only about one Frenchman in fifteen lived in a town of over 20,000 inhabitants. In 1814, apart from Paris, there were only four French towns with over 100,000 inhabitants.[1]

Some idea of France's industrial backwardness compared with Britain at that time can be gained from the following. Iron smelting was still carried on in France with the use of charcoal, whereas in Britain coke furnaces had for fifty years been used for smelting. Thus, in 1821 the output of pig iron in France was 221,000 tons as against 400,000 tons for the United Kingdom. The textile industry was similarly backward compared with that of Britain. Thus the French scientist Chaptal said in 1828:

> We are far from having that profusion of machines, which one sees in England—it is because labour is cheaper with us and because the cheapness of fuel in England enables them to employ machines everywhere with advantage.[2]

Between 1830 and 1870 France was slowly transformed into an industrial country, although after 1850 the pace of industrialisation quickened compared with the previous period. This is indicated by the table of iron and steel production

[1] *Economic Conditions of France and Germany*, 1815–1914, p. 54.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 56.

during this period of which the following representative figures are given.[1]

| | |
|---|---|
| 1824 | 142,000 tons |
| 1847 | 390,000 „ |
| 1857 | 586,000 „ |
| 1869 | 1,014,000 „ |

Between 1830 and 1846 the number of coke furnaces was increased from 29 to 106, and after 1856 there was a much more rapid change over to coal instead of charcoal smelting.

In 1835 the first railway line was built from Roanne to St. Etienne and in the years after 1850 new industries were developed, electric telegraphs were introduced and the *Compagnie Générale Transatlantique* was founded to develop ocean shipping.

But while this meant a quite considerable development of France's industrial power, it was still lagging far behind that of England. For instance, whereas coke smelting was almost universally used in Britain in 1846, in the same year three-fifths of France's iron was still smelted by charcoal. And whereas the output of pig iron in France in 1847 was 591,000 tons, the British output was 2,000,000 tons, a figure which was twice the total output of France's iron and steel production as late as 1869.

It is not possible to go into the reasons why the French bourgeoisie in a country so abundant in resources, and one, moreover, in which a clean sweep of all remnants of feudalism had been made, failed to develop industry more than it did. All that can be said here is that many historians have observed the peculiar timidity and lack of enterprise of the French bourgeoisie where industrial expansion is concerned. Thus the liberal historian Seignobos has said:

> The bourgeoisie of the greater part of France dreaded commercial and industrial enterprises in which its money would have been exposed to a certain amount of risk.

This was shown in a remarkable way when Thiers, as the

[1] *Bulletin de la Statistique Générale de la France.*

spokesman of a section of the bourgeoisie, protested in 1836 against the building of the first railway line, and declared that such a project must inevitably fail.

### *French Society* 1814–1870

As France during this period was predominantly an agricultural country, the peasantry formed the vast majority of the nation. Alongside the peasantry there was a considerable middle-class population in the towns, composed of small shopkeepers, independent workers, small businessmen and members of the liberal professions.

*The proletariat* was at this time only in process of formation. Many of the workers who have since been identified with the proletariat because of the part they played in the political struggles of 1830, 1848 and 1870 were not strictly speaking factory proletarians at all, but were in many cases independent craft workers owning their own workshops. The number of independent artisans in France at this time is indicated by J. H. Clapham[1] in 1848, for every four employees in industry there was one independent worker and twenty years later, in 1868, out of 101,000 people living in Paris and classed as manufacturers, 62,000 worked alone or with one assistant.

Nevertheless, large numbers of workers came to be concentrated in those cotton mills, iron and steel works and other factories that were established in this period. In the 1860's there were 10,000 workers at the Creusot factory, 6,000 at the Rive de Gier and 5,000 at de Wendel's.

*The commercial and industrial sections of the bourgeoisie* were at this time also very weak. The historian Seignobos says:

> The wealth of France still consisted mainly of real property. There were hardly any rich merchants except in Paris and in some of the ports, hardly any rich industrialists, with the exception of the ironmasters of the forests of Lorraine, and hardly any wealthy employers of labour, except in the regions engaged in the textile industries or in coalmining, which were as yet few in number.[2]

[1] *Economic Conditions of France and Germany*, 1815–1914.
[2] *A History of the French People*, p. 320.

Thus the merchants and industrialists who under Napoleon's regime had enjoyed considerable power, and whose interests had been actively furthered by the Emperor's policy, lost, with the Restoration, their share in the state power, which was now vested exclusively in the landowning section of the bourgeoisie.

The rule of the landowners was expressed in the constitution of Louis XVIII, which gave the vote to the 80,000 wealthiest men of the land, thus including all the big landowners but excluding the majority of merchants and industrialists, whose wealth at this time was less than that of the landowners.

During the decades after 1814, as a result of the development of the productive forces, the other sections of the bourgeoisie —the industrialists and the big traders—grew in wealth and influence and increasingly challenged the position of the landowners.

The resulting struggle between different sections of the bourgeoisie for the possession of state power largely determined the peculiar character of French history during many decades of the nineteenth century. Thus a number of changes in the form of the French state took place, which to the superficial observer would appear merely as repeated unsuccessful revolts by the people followed on each occasion by increasingly ferocious reaction, but which in fact represent successive stages in the development of the bourgeoisie as a ruling class.

The opposition of the merchants and industrialists to a regime based on the exclusive rule of the landowners, together with the discontent of the masses of the people, led to the Revolution of 1830. This was carried through by the workers, students and petty-bourgeoisie of Paris. The monarch of the time, Louis XVIII's successor, Charles X, fled and was replaced by Louis-Philippe. The main result of this revolution was that the financiers took their place alongside the landowners as equal partners in control of the state power. Lafitte, Louis-Philippe's Prime Minister, on taking office in 1830 said frankly: "The reign of the bankers will now begin."

The corrupt rule of the finance oligarchy which ensued

helped many to realise that big changes were taking place in the social and political life of France. They began to realise that the bourgeoisie, which in 1789 had been a progressive class representing the interests of the French people as a whole, was now increasingly becoming a reactionary class, whose interests were sharply opposed to those of the mass of the French people. At the time of the Great Revolution there had been no developed antagonisms between the working class and the bourgeoisie. The workers then almost all worked in very small concerns and could in many cases scarcely be distinguished socially from the masters themselves. But during the nineteenth century, as industry developed, masses of workers were herded together in factories in the same revolting conditions as existed in England during our industrial revolution and bitter struggles developed between the capitalist owners, who saw in their factories and the workers they employed a source of unprecedented profit, and the workers whose life would be worth living only in so far as they gained from their masters by their own efforts better conditions of work and life.

As regards the peasantry, while the bourgeoisie had previously been the class which had helped the peasants to win their land, they had now become the class to whom the peasants were indebted and their land mortgaged.

And to the whole mass of the nation the bourgeoisie was now the class whose state imposed upon them a tremendous burden of indirect taxes, levied on the necessities of life, so that the financiers might be assured a constantly increasing income in the form of interest on loans they had made to the state.

In 1789 the French bourgeoisie had represented culture and humanity. The nineteenth century bourgeoisie became the very antithesis of culture and humanity. The ruthless reduction of all human and cultural values to francs and centimes revolted those French writers, thinkers, artists and scientists, who had retained any sense of these human values.

That is why so many literary and cultural movements of the nineteenth century, such as that of the Romantics, made

hatred of the bourgeoisie and of everything bourgeois an article of faith, however much these same movements were still contained within bourgeois limitations.

### *The Rise of the French Working Class*

While the bourgeoisie had become a reactionary class, there was developing within French society a new class, the proletariat, which in the future would increasingly come to represent the interests of the French people as a whole.

The first workers' movements which came into history in the years between 1814 and 1840, do not yet reveal among the workers who take part in them any consciousness of the interests and aims of the workers as a class. They are blind, instinctive, despairing revolts against an intolerable way of life. Thus the workers of Lyons in 1830 rose in revolt, seized control of the town, and kept it for three days before they were suppressed. But they had no political aims. All they demanded was work and a minimum wage to keep themselves and their families from starvation. On their black banners they inscribed the slogan " Live by working or die by fighting."

At this time in so far as the workers took part in the political struggle they fought not their own battles but those of other classes, they fought " the enemies of their enemies ", as in the July revolution of 1830 in Paris.

About 1840, for the first time, the French workers began to be influenced by socialist theories. Previously crude Utopian theories of a socialistic nature had been formulated by such men as Fourier and Saint Simon, but these theoreticians were members of the middle classes who appealed to society in general, in the hope that what they thought to be the *inherent* reasonableness of their schemes would lead to their adoption by all classes of society, oppressed and oppressors alike. But now workers, alongside the petty bourgeoisie and the republican section of the capitalists, joined in the political " clubs " that were set up, such as the *Société des Saisons*. In these clubs the more politically conscious workers learned for the first time about socialism, which was propagated by Blanqui.

Once again the struggle of the workers, now more clearly defined as a class, was merged with the striving of the middle class of the towns for a democratic constitution, and with the efforts of the merchants and industrialists to win their share of state power. In 1848 the government of Louis-Philippe was overthrown by the same classes whose previous action in 1830 had enabled it to take power.

In the Revolution of 1848 the workers, although they were still, from an objective point of view, fighting the battles of another class, put forward for the first time their own class political demands. Under the pressure of the workers Albert, a mechanic, and Louis Blanc, a socialist leader, were included in the provisional government, a special Ministry of Labour was set up and the workers demanded the " right to work ". The desire of the workers for socialism was summed up at this time by the demand for national workshops (that is, workshops run by the state) where, many of the workers thought, socialism would begin to flourish side by side with capitalism.

A provisional government, representing the different classes who took part in the revolution, was formed and a democratic constitution was drafted. But the power of the landowners and financiers was in no way challenged. Having climbed to power on the backs of the workers, the merchants and industrialists felt that they could dispense with them. The workers of Paris were provoked to rebellion and their movement put down with violence and bloodshed.

But after the suppression of the workers the middle class and the lower sections of the bourgeoisie were unable to maintain their position as against the financiers and landowners. Napoleon III, nephew of the great Napoleon, was elected President. The democratic constitution was abolished and the strange rule of violence, demagogy and adventurism of Napoleon III, despite all its contradictions and inconsistencies, once more in essence established the rule of the financial and landowning bourgeoisie.

For many years after 1848, when the workers' movement had been sharply brought to an end, there were few signs

of any independent activity by the working class, but in 1864 they had so far recovered as to win from Napoleon the right to form trade unions and about the same time a number of unions were formed to fight for better conditions.

In 1870 for the second time in a third of a century, in a France ravaged by war, the struggle between the workers and the bourgeoisie flared up in open warfare. Thanks to the reactionary, adventurist policy of Napoleon III, France was involved in war with Prussia and met with disastrous defeat. Napoleon III was overthrown and the people of Paris forced the proclamation of a republic.

Amid the confusion of defeat the people of Paris kept their independence. Thiers and the bourgeois government at Versailles ordered the confiscation of the cannon of the Parisians' National Guard. The conflict which followed led to the proclamation of the Commune—a government composed mainly of workers, as representatives elected by the people of Paris.

This government was not consciously a socialist government, to the end its aims were defensive. It wished to preserve the freedom of Paris against the threatened dictatorship of Thiers and the bourgeoisie. But being composed of workers and relying on the armed workers for its power, it became in essence the first workers' government, the embryonic form of the future socialist state. It carried through measures in the interests of the working people and the middle class. It maintained public services, forbade nightwork in bakeries and the practice of fining in factories. It handed over to the workers factories from which the owners had fled, declared a moratorium on debts, forbade the sale of goods in the municipal pawnshops and separated the Church from the state. After three months the Commune was defeated and suppressed by the troops sent against it by Thiers. Thousands of workers died fighting and thousands of others were taken prisoner and tortured or massacred.

Thus in the years just described the working class of France had developed into a class with a growing consciousness of its common interests and aims, a class which had for a brief

period taken power into its own hands. And in raising the standard of revolt in the French capital the French workers were in a sense fighting the battle of the vast majority of the French people, who stood to gain from democracy and the freedom of their country which had been defended by the Commune.

Why was it then that in 1870 as in 1848 and 1830, the workers together with the middle class of the towns had been strong enough to carry through these revolutions but not yet strong enough to maintain themselves in power? First because the French bourgeoisie still had a future before it, both economically and politically. As we have seen, throughout the whole of this period industrial capitalism was developing in France and, as we shall see later, was destined to continue to develop for many decades yet. Corresponding to this the political revolution of the bourgeoisie was carried to completion by the events of 1830, 1848 and 1870. And this was the essential content of these revolutions, despite the part played in them by the common people. Each of these events, as we have seen, was a stage whereby a larger and larger section of the bourgeoisie won its share of state power. Thus in 1873, after the long series of upheavals and at a time when industry was more developed and the bourgeoisie more welded together as a homogeneous class than ever before, the Third Republic was proclaimed. At last the whole bourgeoisie had found the form of state in which its rule could be expressed. This form of state continued to exist for 67 years, until 1940.

In each of these revolutions, however, and this explains their apparently popular character, the participation of the workers and the town middle classes was needed in order to carry the revolution through to success, as the lower sections of the bourgeoisie were not strong enough by themselves to defeat their powerful rivals. But in each case, as soon as the section of the bourgeoisie which was seeking its place in the sun had found it, any attempt by the lower classes and particularly the workers, to carry the revolution further in their own interests, was suppressed.

Secondly, the workers themselves were still very immature politically. The working-class movement was still held back by the survivals within its own ranks of the outlook which characterised the class from which it had barely emerged, the petty-bourgeoisie. The socialism in which the workers believed was in many ways not proletarian socialism but the " petty-bourgeois socialism " which Karl Marx exposed in the *Communist Manifesto.* Along with Louis Blanc, many of them still believed that it was possible to achieve socialism alongside capitalism through the setting up of state workshops which would gradually oust capitalist private industry because of their superior " power of attraction ".

This petty-bourgeois influence can also be seen in the socialist theories of the genuinely proletarian leader Blanqui, who for most of his life believed in the method of the *coup d'état*, of the small body of armed and highly organised leaders who would seize power on behalf of the masses. Blanqui had, at the time when he believed this, enough confidence in the masses to devote his life to, and suffer imprisonment for, their cause, but had not yet enough understanding to realise that they must fight for themselves.

Further, the French working-class movement was at a very low stage from the point of view of industrial organisation. At a time when there had grown up well organised trade unions and co-operative societies in England, there were scarcely any trade unions in France.

All these weaknesses were reflected in the events of the Commune, where the workers were divided into two factions where numerous personal rivalries broke out and where the leaders made a number of mistakes (later to be carefully analysed by Marx and Lenin).

Thirdly, besides these weaknesses within the working class, another condition was still wanting without which the workers' struggles could not be crowned with success—a condition which was described by Marx as follows:

> The French workers could not take a step forward, could not touch a hair of the bourgeois order before the

course of the Revolution had forced the mass of the nation, peasants and petty-bourgeois, standing between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie to revolt against this order, against the rule of capital, to attach itself to the proletariat as its vanguard.[1]

During the first half of the century the peasants and the petty-bourgeoisie in general suffered at the hands of big capital. But during the first half of the century the economic position of the peasantry in particular changed very sharply. Under Napoleon, because of the Revolution which had given them land, the peasantry had been modestly prosperous. In *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, his masterly study of French society during this period, Marx traces the changes which took place in the lot of the peasantry.

". . . in the course of the nineteenth century the feudal lords were replaced by urban usurers; the feudal obligation that went with the land was replaced by the mortgage; aristocratic landed property was replaced by bourgeois capital. The small holding of the peasant is now only the pretext that allows the capitalist to draw profits, interest and rent from the soil, while leaving it to the tiller of the soil himself to see how he can extract his wages. The mortgage debt burdening the soil of France imposes on the French peasantry payment of an amount of interest equal to the annual interest on the entire British national debt. Small-holding property, in this enslavement by capital to which its development inevitably pushes forward, has transformed the mass of the French nation into troglodytes. Sixteen million peasants (including women and children) dwell in hovels, a large number of which have but one opening, others only two, and the most favoured only three. . . . To the four million (including children, etc.) officially recognised paupers, vagabonds, criminals and prostitutes in France must be added five millions who hover

[1] *The Class Struggles in France*, 1848–1850, *Marx : Selected Works*, Vol. II, p. 204.

> on the margin of existence and either have their haunts in the countryside itself or, with their rags and their children, continually desert the countryside for the towns or the towns for the countryside.[1]

The middle class of the towns was similarly impoverished by the development of nineteenth-century capitalism. The small shopkeepers became indebted to the industrialists, the merchants, the landlords and the financiers. Their trade began to be filched from them by the big stores which were springing up in the towns.

Nevertheless, the vast majority of the middle class, and in particular the peasantry, did not "attach themselves" to the working class at this period. However dissatisfied the peasantry may have been with successive bourgeois governments, whenever it came to an open conflict between the working class and the bourgeoisie, the peasantry acted (without consciously knowing it) as a bulwark of the existing order of society against the progressive cause represented by the workers.

Thus in 1848 the National Assembly elected by the peasantry brought into being the government which provoked and then violently suppressed a revolt by the workers, and in 1849 the votes of the peasantry elected to the presidency Napoleon III, who abolished the democratic rights which had been won in the previous year's struggle. And thus, when the workers of Paris set up the Commune, the peasantry, while by no means satisfied with the government of Thiers, did very little to stop him from crushing the Commune.

Why did the French peasantry, contrary to its own material interests, play such a role in the history of the time? The answer to this question was provided by Marx in the *Eighteenth Brumaire:*

> The small peasants form a vast mass, the members of which live in similar conditions, but without entering into manifold relations with one another. Their mode of

[1] *Marx : Selected Works*, Vol. II, pp. 418–9.

production isolates them from one another, instead of bringing them into mutual intercourse. The isolation is increased by France's bad means of communication and by the poverty of the peasants. Their field of production, the small holding, admits of no division of labour in its cultivation, no application of science and, therefore, no multiplicity of development, no diversity of talents, no wealth of social relationships. Each individual peasant family is almost self-sufficient; it itself directly produces the major part of its consumption and thus acquires its means of life more through exchange with nature than in intercourse with society. The small holding, the peasant and his family; alongside them another small holding, another peasant and his family. A few score of these make up a village, and a few score of villages make a Department. In this way the great mass of the French nation is formed by the simple addition of homologous magnitudes, much as potatoes in a sack form a sackful of potatoes. In so far as millions of families live under economic conditions of existence that divide their mode of life, their interests and their culture from those of other classes and put them in hostile contrast with the latter, they form a class. In so far as there is a merely local interconnection among these small peasants, and the identity of their interests begets no unity, no national union and no political organisation, they do not form a class. They are consequently incapable of enforcing their class interest in their own name, whether through a parliament or through a convention. They cannot represent themselves, they must be represented. Their representative must at the same time appear as their master, as an authority over them, as an unlimited governmental power that protects them against the other classes and sends them the rain and the sunshine from above. The political influence of the small peasants, therefore, finds its final expression in the executive power subordinating society to itself.[1]

[1] *Marx* : *Selected Works*, Vol. II, pp. 414-15.

Thus it was that in the nineteenth century the bourgeoisie, which was at that time by far the strongest class in French society, despite the apparent instability of its rule, was able to turn the political aspirations of the peasantry into a weapon for its own rule.

But although, for the reasons outlined, the movement of the working class during this period was twice crushed by force, it must not be thought that its struggles at this time were without result. Through all the temporary triumphs and defeats of this period, through all the battles for doctrinaire theories and slogans, the French working class was slowly and painfully acquiring consciousness of its aims, it was gaining the bitter experiences which alone could steel it into an organised political force capable of playing its proper part in determining the future of the French people as a whole. Furthermore, as we shall see in the next chapter, after the tyrannical regimes of Louis-Philippe and Napoleon III, the struggles of the working class, the proof of their strength and the threat that they might be able to repeat 1848 and 1870 on an even bigger scale in the future, helped to bring about the Third Republic, in which in many ways there existed far more favourable conditions for the advance of the working class, for the building up of their political parties and trade unions.

But above all, the French workers of 1848 and 1870 were fighting for the future of the working class in all countries. Through the sacrifices of '48 and '70, the French workers gave to the international working-class movement a wealth of experience which was essential for the further advance of the movement. Through these events the workers of other countries were able to see what bloodshed and violence would be let loose by the ruling classes in order to maintain their power. But more than this they were given living proof of the fact that the working class is actually capable of taking power and of running society in its own way. The greatest leaders of the working class, men like Marx and Lenin, studied in great detail the experiences of the Paris Commune, and drew from this study lessons which enabled the workers

of Russia in 1917 to take power, to maintain it, and to build a socialist society. Therefore one might say: without the struggles and defeats of the Paris workers in 1848 and 1870 no victorious Soviet revolution in 1917, no Soviet state, no socialist civilisation on one-sixth of the earth today.

## CHAPTER III

### THE RISE OF FRENCH IMPERIALISM

THE development of French society and of French politics from 1870 to 1914 does not continue from the previous period as it were in a straight line. 1870 to 1914 is the epoch of the growth of monopoly capitalism on a world scale. In a small number of the most advanced capitalist countries, the United States, Britain, Germany, Japan, France, there is an unprecedented growth of industry together with the concentration of the industries and the banks into the hands of a few big concerns. And this is accompanied by the colonisation and the division into 'spheres of influence' of the whole world between these big powers. Henceforth the history of France cannot be understood apart from the history of world imperialism as a whole.

In this period in France, as in the other main capitalist countries, there is a big expansion of industry. For instance, the output of coal increases from 19·4 million tons in 1880 to 33·4 million tons in 1900 and to 40·8 million tons in 1913. The average annual increase of the output of all French industry between 1860 and 1913 has been calculated at 2⅔ per cent. and the total increase between 1890 and 1913 at 79 per cent.

While France remained even now predominantly a country of small industrial concerns, alongside the latter a number of big industrial units were set up which accounted for a percentage of the total workers employed and the total industrial

output of France out of all proportion to the number of such units. The Soviet economists Varga and Mendelsohn quote from the *Bulletin de la Statistique Générale de la France* (April–June, 1933) the following figures which show the concentration of French industry in large concerns in the year 1906.[1]

*France (without Alsace-Lorraine)*

*Establishments employing over 50 workers*

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Total number of establishments of all sizes | 2,335,114 | |
| Number of establishments employing over 50 | 9,091 | |
| Proportion of these to total | | 0·38% |
| Number employed in all establishments | 6,200,000 | |
| In establishments of over 50 employees | 1,900,000 | |
| Proportion of these to total | | 30·6% |

*Giant establishments of over 1,000 workers*

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Number of establishments | 207 | |
| Number of workers employed | 500,000 | |
| Proportion of these concerns to all industry according to number of establishments | | ·008% |
| According to number employed | | 8·1% |

From these figures we see that although only 0·38 per cent. of all industrial establishments in France employed more than 50 workers each, this same 0·38 per cent. employed 1,900,000 workers, that is nearly one-third of the workers employed in all establishments. We further note that 900,000 workers were employed in 207 giant factories each of which employed more than 1,000 workers.

[1] *New Data for Lenin's Imperialism*, p. 23.

Numbers of the large concerns were grouped together in trusts. One of the biggest and most wealthy of these groups was the Comité des Forges, founded in 1864. About 1880 the Comité des Forges began to buy up a large number of concerns outside the metal industry such as mining, electrical and shipping concerns while practically the whole of the French metal industry fell into the hands of three powerful industrial groupings, Marin-Homecourt, Denain-Anzin, Chatillon-Commentry, which were themselves closely bound up with the Comité des Forges.

Alongside the concentration of industry, wealth was being concentrated in the hands of a few big banks which extended their network over the whole country. As Lenin wrote :

> In France, the three most important banks (Crédit Lyonnais, the Comptoir National d'Escompte de Paris and the Société Générale) extended their operations and their network of branches in the following manner :

| *Number of branches and offices* | | | *Capital in million francs* | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Year* | *Provinces* | *Paris* | *Total* | *Own capital* | *Borrowed capital* |
| 1870 | 47 | 17 | 64 | 200 | 427 |
| 1890 | 192 | 66 | 258 | 265 | 1,245 |
| 1909 | 1,003 | 196 | 1,229 | 887 | 4,363[1] |

The wealth of the banks is also indicated by the growth of the national debt, the interest on which for the most part goes not to the small investor but to the biggest shareholders of the main banks, increasing the tremendous accumulation of capital which the latter control. Thus between 1870 and 1900 the national debt of France increased from 11,516 to 25,839 million francs. The banks themselves came to exercise a controlling interest in industry and the ownership of the biggest banks and the biggest industrial concerns was merged into one.

The increase in the productive capacity of the big industrial units and the accompanying accumulation of capital created a

[1] *Selected Works*, Vol. V, p. 30.

frantic search for markets abroad, for sources of raw material, supplies of cheap labour and outlets for investment. The French bourgeoisie tried to meet their needs by colonial expansion and by the investment of capital in and the issuing of loans to Europe. In the eighties Tunis, Tongking, Annam and Cambodia (now known as French Indo-China) were annexed and in 1890 Madagascar. During the following decade France colonised part of Africa—Dahomey, Timbuktu, Senegal, and in West Africa to Fashoda and the head waters of the Nile. Thus between 1876 and 1899, the population of the French colonial Empire increased from 6 to 56 million.

During the same period French capital invested overseas increased as follows (in billion francs at pre-war parity) :

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1869 | .. | .. | 10 |
| 1880 | .. | .. | 15 |
| 1890 | .. | .. | 20 |
| 1914 | .. | .. | 60 |

France became known as the banker of Europe. In particular French capital financed Russia, and in return received from the Tsar guarantees that a certain percentage of capital loaned would be used to purchase goods in France.

Thus French capitalism became an integral part of the world system of imperialism. Her connections with the rest of the world were strengthened by the penetration of foreign capital into France and by the entry of French industry into the international monopolies (such as the International Zinc Monopoly) which were springing up. British capital was invested in some branches of French industry, and foreign industry captured certain sections of the French market, for instance, the market for fats and chemicals.

France thus came to be an important link in the world chain of imperialism. In proportion to her wealth and industrial capacity, France became the foremost " rentier state ". French capital dominated large parts of Europe. This is shown by the figure for the issue by the major imperialist countries of

foreign securities in 1913 (in million gold dollars at pre-1931 parity) :

| | |
|---|---|
| Great Britain .. | 781 |
| U.S.A. .. .. | 44 |
| France .. .. | 684[1] |

The figure for Germany was also much smaller than that for France. When we remember that the productive capacity and national wealth of Britain was several times higher than that of France, we can see what a very important part the issuing of foreign loans played in the wealth-getting of the French bourgeoisie.

By 1914 France had become the third largest colonial Empire in size and the second largest in respect of population, as is shown by the following table :

*Colonies in* 1914 (*millions of square miles and millions of inhabitants*)

| | *Area* | *Population* |
|---|---|---|
| Great Britain .. .. | 33·5 | 393·5 |
| Russia .. .. .. | 17·4 | 33·2 |
| France .. .. .. | 10·6 | 55·5 |
| Germany.. .. .. | 2·9 | 12·3 |
| U.S.A. .. .. .. | 0·3 | 9·7[2] |

On the other hand, despite the expansion of French industry, the total industrial production of France during this period lagged behind that of the other major imperialist powers. The increase in industrial production in the five main industrial capitalist countries during the years before the war was as follows :

| (In percentages) | 1860–1880 | 1890–1913 |
|---|---|---|
| Russia .. .. | 113 | 270 |
| U.S.A. .. .. | 113 | 156 |
| Germany .. .. | 78 | 148 |
| France .. .. | 65 | 79 |
| Great Britain .. .. | 56 | 61 |

This meant that French industry was caught up and exceeded

[1] Varga and Mendelsohn. The figure for France is their own computation.
[2] Lenin, *Selected Works*, Vol. V, p. 73.

by Germany. Thus in 1913 whereas the total steel output of German industry was 19 million tons, that of France was only 5 million tons, and whereas the output of coal was 190.1 million tons for Germany, it was only 40·8 million tons for France.[1]

Again, it is not possible to analyse here the reasons for the comparatively slow development which has characterised French capitalism right from the Great Revolution up to the present day. But here is a comment on the question by the French Marxist historian André Ribard from his book *France—History of a People* :

> French capitalism hesitated to exploit the domains which its armies had conquered for it. It was the same within France where the bourgeoisie preferred lending money to foreign states rather than to its own industrialists, fearing to risk anything for the improvement of the national productive equipment. Fear made France into the banker of Europe for want of knowing how to become a great industrial country.

* * * * *

Thanks to the expansion of industry, the growth of the French Empire, the drawing of tribute from all quarters of the world, the concentration of wealth in the metropolis, the French bourgeoisie in the years after 1870 was able to make certain economic and political concessions to the middle class and to certain sections of the working class, thus bringing these sections for the moment under their political influence, while retaining and even strengthening their control over society through the state.

In the years round 1900 large sections of the French middle class enjoyed a prosperity they had never known before. Millions of professional people, shopkeepers and peasants had become small investors, all highly conscious of their supposed stake in the capitalist system and in the world imperialist position of France, all cherishing the dream of winning a fortune which would once and for all remove the insecurity which

[1] Varga and Mendelsohn, *New Data*, p. 302.

had haunted their lives. Even for sections of the working class from the turn of the century there were higher wages and a higher standard of living, which the bourgeoisie were able to give them thanks to its profits from overseas. Between 1870 and 1914, the wages of non-agricultural workers rose as follows (1895 = 100):

| | *Gross money wages* | *Cost of living* | *Gross real wages* |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1870 | 79 | 102 | 77 |
| 1914 | 123 | 110 | 112 |

In connection with this Kuczynski remarks :

> And it is not astounding that some of the enormous extra profits derived from the employment of labour outside of France have been applied to (not for) the benefit of French labour by French capitalism, be it to ensure an uninterrupted production process without strikes and labour struggles as far as that is possible, or be it for other similar reasons.[1]

This was therefore a period of certain democratic reforms. In a situation in which France's material prosperity was increasing daily, but in which the memories of the Commune still lived, in which the threat of political action by the working class and serious conflicts within the ruling class itself both remained, the bourgeois democratic republic was found to be the only way out. It was the only form of state which could prevent a bloody struggle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat from breaking out every ten or twenty years, which could retain the influence of the bourgeoisie over the middle classes, and enable the different warring sections of the bourgeoisie to maintain their interests within the framework of a state which represented the bourgeoisie as a whole. " The Third Republic," said Thiers, " is the form of state which divided us least." (Which is a very true remark if by " us " is meant the bourgeoisie.)

Thus the Third Republic is the product of three contradictory elements of the situation in France at the time when it was founded (1871). First, the class struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie which, despite everything which had

[1] Kuczynski, *Labour Conditions in Western Europe*, pp. 105–7.

temporarily weakened the working class, still powerfully affected the whole history of the time. Second, the contradictions within the ruling class itself, between the landowners, the financiers, and the industrialists. Although the ruling class was now being welded more and more into a homogeneous whole by the fusion of the banks and the big industrial concerns and the intermarriage between the landowners and the rest of the bourgeoisie, the conflicts between the two sections were still serious, and were reflected in the struggle between the Republican bourgeoisie and the Royalists with their different affiliations.[1] Third, the expansion of French imperialism, which made possible certain democratic concessions. Without all these elements the Republic of 1873 would probably never have come into being.

According to the Constitution of the Third Republic, the Chamber of Deputies was elected by universal male suffrage. The President (a mere figurehead) was elected by the upper and lower House (the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate). Political parties representing different classes or sections of classes grew up, and were represented in the Chamber. Government was carried on by cabinets formed from combination of Parties which could command the support of the majority of the deputies. After a time the working class won the right to form its own parties and organisations. Legal political parties of the working class were formed and their representatives were elected to the Chamber of Deputies. In 1884 trade unions and trades councils (*bourses de travail*) were legalised. Under the pressure of the workers and the middle classes a number of reforms were carried through. In the eighties a number of bills were passed as a result of which the French people won "free, secular, and universal education". In 1905, under the influence largely of the new " Radical and Radical Socialist Party " (usually known simply as the Radical Party) which represented the masses of the middle class, the separation of Church from state was carried through.

All this time the ruling class were confirming the truth of the

[1] For instance, those who supported the Bourbons and those who supported the House of Orleans.

famous description of the Third Republic as the "perfect bourgeois republic". The constitution, while having certain democratic features, also provided safeguards against its "misuse" by the people against the bourgeoisie. The distribution of parliamentary seats was so arranged as to give the countryside a representation larger in proportion to population than was given to the towns so that the "more moderate" vote of the peasantry might securely outweigh the more revolutionary workers' vote. The Senate, that is the Upper House, was elected indirectly and by an extremely restricted franchise, and at each senatorial election (which took place every three years) only one-third of the senators were elected. Thus the Senate as a whole was elected only once in nine years—an arrangement which provided a safeguard against the sudden anger of the people and gave the bourgeoisie the advantage of the short memory of the less politically conscious section of the people.

The instability of government, expressed in the many changes of cabinet—changes which took place almost annually and often more frequently than that during the whole period of the French Republic—was at that time only apparent. Whoever might become Prime Minister (an office, it should be noted, which was separate from that of the President), whatever parties were represented in the cabinet, the same permanent officials remained in the departments of state and the same policy was pursued—the policy of the big bourgeoisie. And as time went on the machinery of government was perfected as the "executive committee of the ruling class." In 1906 the Corps of Financial Inspectors was introduced—a convenient institution which, under the pretext of financial inspection, enabled the direct representatives of the financial oligarchy to be placed in every department of state. And when the Radical Party, the party of the middle class, the party which prided itself on its anti-clericalism and its great Jacobin traditions, in 1902 got a majority in parliament and formed its first cabinet, the representative of the Rothschilds, Rouvier, remained in the cabinet.

The bourgeoisie profited well from its control of the state.

During the whole period the national debt steadily increased and with this the flow of state money into the hands of the shareholders of the big banks and the increased power of the banks over the state. At the same time, until 1914 the bourgeoisie was able to escape in the main the natural consequence of the rising national debt—a progressive income tax—which was first introduced only at the outbreak of war. From time to time vast financial swindles were engineered, in which thousands of small investors lost their money. In many cases the government was able to keep the dirtiest details away from the notice of the public. In the best known of these swindles, that connected with the Panama Canal scheme, the secret was kept for some years because so many members of the government and of the Chamber of Deputies, including deputies representing "progressive parties" such as the Radicals, were implicated.

At this time the middle class, while being in favour of certain democratic reforms such as those mentioned above, was on the whole very hostile to socialism and suspicious of the working class, which it regarded as a threat to its small investments and to its dreams of rising into the *grande bourgeoisie*.

Among sections of the working class there was a development of opportunism, of the illusion, carefully fostered by the ruling class, that socialism could be achieved stage by stage, in and through parliamentary reforms, through peaceful trade union negotiations, through parliamentary combinations and intrigues. This was the period of the entry of "Socialist" ministers into the government. In 1900 the "Socialist" leader Millerand took his place in a bourgeoisie cabinet, side by side with the "butcher of the Commune" Gallifet. Between 1900 and 1914 Millerand was joined by two other "Socialists", Aristide Briand and Viviani, the latter of whom created the first Ministry of Labour to be organised by the Third Republic.

For the working class this was mainly a period of slow preparation for the decisive battles to come. Although it was, as has been said, a period of reforms, a time in which sections of the working class enjoyed considerable increases in real

wages, economic and political repression continued and in some ways grew worse. The rise of real wages for the working class as a whole which was mentioned earlier, was more than offset by other factors—the gradual severance of connections which had previously existed between the town workers and their relatives in the countryside (from which they had emigrated during the past generation or so), the rise of big factories and the consequent worsening of working conditions and the intensification of work. Thus Kuczynski calculates that during this period, despite increased wages, conditions of life of the French workers declined sharply. It must also be remembered that the most elementary reforms—such as Factory Acts regulating hours and conditions of work and forbidding child labour—were not passed until the eighties.

While France was now a democratic republic the memories of the Commune still lived. The bourgeoisie continued its violent repression and denied the working class struggle legal forms for a number of years after the shooting of the last Communard. In 1872 a law was passed banning the International Workingmen's Association in France and in 1873 this law was used as a pretext for suppressing French trade unions. It was not until 1884 that trade unions were legalised, and the law which permitted them to exist did so only on condition that they did not interfere with the liberty of work ("porter atteinte à la liberté de travail")—a phrase which could be given a very wide interpretation by bourgeois courts of law. Throughout these years, any "excesses" on the part of the workers were put down with violence. Clemenceau, "the tiger", justified his name ver largely by his repression of the working class during his periods of office between 1900 and 1914, and on several occasions caused troops to be used against workers striking in defence of their rights.

Against exploitation and political repression the workers fought by building up their trade unions and political parties, and in the process, despite all weaknesses, they gained in political consciousness.

From 1884, when trade unions were first made legal, the

number of unions and their membership grew rapidly, as is shown by the following table :

*Number of Trade Unions Legally Constituted* (since 1884)

| *Year* | *Number of Unions* | *Members* |
|---|---|---|
| 1884 .. .. | 68 | |
| 1885 .. .. | 221 | |
| 1890 .. .. | 1,006 | 139,698 |
| 1900 .. .. | 2,685 | 492,647 |
| 1914 .. .. | 4,846 | 1,026,302 |

In the same year, 1884, local trade union branches began to be grouped together in the Bourses de Travail (trades councils), and the number of these grew rapidly, from 10 in 1844 to 73 in 1900, and to 201 in 1914.

In 1896 at Limoges the French Trades Union Congress (Confédération Générale de Travail, usually known as the C.G.T.) was formed. One particular way in which the constitution of the C.G.T. differed from the present constitution of the English T.U.C. was that it accepted the affiliation of trades councils.

The socialist consciousness of the working class rapidly revived after the setback of the suppression of the Commune. Guesde, a leading French disciple of Marx at the time, saw the significance of the Workers' Congress that was held in Rouen in 1876 to discuss the protection of labour " barely five years after the events of May " as a sign of the power of quick revival of the French working class and their speedy realisation of the need for independent organised action. The encouraging feature of this period was the spread of Marxist theories, even though in a somewhat doctrinaire form, among the workers. The lessons which the workers were learning as a result of the defeats of 1848 and 1870 are typified by the words uttered by Blanqui as an old man, shortly before his death :

> It is to themselves that the people look for their well-being, they wish to make and they will make their own laws,

thus showing that he had come to understand that the revolutionary minority was not enough and that the working class as a whole can and must achieve its own liberation.

During the seventies Guesde tried to organise an international workers' congress in France. This project was banned by the police and Guesde was arrested. The dock became a tribune from which many French people for the first time heard proclaimed the clear scientific doctrine of Marx. During this period, through meetings, study circles and pamphlets, Guesde and Lafargue took Marxism to the French working class. In 1879 a socialist congress was held. A resolution was passed supporting the collective appropriation of the means of production ; it was recognised that the Commune had represented the " coming to power of the working class " and a new party, the Workers' Party (Parti Ouvrier) was formed. In the following year the demand for the return of those Communards who had been exiled grew strong ; a working-class candidate was elected to the Chamber and as a result of the pressure of the workers, the exiles were allowed to return. In 1890 the Second International was founded, and for the first time French workers celebrated May Day by staying away from work.

But despite these advances, the working class had by no means purged itself of the petty-bourgeois weaknesses, the " leftism " which had marred its struggle in the past. During the eighties many workers were more attracted by anarchism than by the scientific socialism of Guesde and Lafargue. A number of outrages and assassinations carried out by the anarchists, including the assassination of a President of the Republic, made the workers' struggle more difficult.

Against this Jaurès, one of the greatest working-class leaders of the pre-1914 period, raised the question of anarchist outrages in the Chamber of Deputies. He pointed out that in some cases anarchists were financed by the bourgeoisie themselves in order to discredit the working class, and that terrorist methods have nothing in common with those of scientific socialism.

This was also a period in which many workers developed a

syndicalist outlook—the belief that their aims could be realised by means of the economic struggle alone, by the general strike led by the C.G.T. and without the aid and guidance of a political party of the workers. At the 1906 Congress of the C.G.T. at Amiens this outlook was officially adopted, together with the slogan " le C.G.T. suffit a lui-même " (the C.G.T. is in itself sufficient). Unlike the British working-class movement, in which the Labour Party arose as the political wing of the trade union movement and has ever since been inseparably connected with the latter, the French socialist parties and the French trade union movement developed separately and had little connection with one another during this period. This was perhaps the most serious of all the weaknesses of the working-class movement.

Lastly, the leftism which we have mentioned was reflected even in the outlook of a leading French Marxist such as Guesde. Guesde for instance overlooked to some extent the need for the working class to carry on all forms of struggle, within the framework of bourgeois democracy, and at a time when the vast majority of the French people were vigorously taking sides in the Dreyfus case (a case in which a Jewish officer, Dreyfus, was falsely accused of espionage, and which became a test case in the fight against militarist reaction and class and racial distinction) Guesde stood aside from the mass movement.

The last few years before the World War of 1914-18 were on the whole not years of political progress for the working class. Marxism had little influence at that time, when the mass of the workers were divided between the opportunist tendencies of certain " Socialist " leaders who supported the war preparations of the French ruling class, and the negative anti-militarism of the anarchists. Though all the time a militant minority remained faithful to Marxism and to the international duties of the working class. A few days before the outbreak of war Jean Jaurès and Marcel Cachin (later to become one of the finest leaders of the French Communist Party) visited the President of the Republic, urging him to intervene with the Tsar in favour of peace. Jaurès was assassinated in a cafè.

War broke out. But in the war of 1914–18 many illusions were exploded, and conditions were created for the further advance of the working class.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE CRISIS OF POST-WAR FRANCE

THE people of France suffered even more than the British people in the war of 1914–18. French casualties amounted to 1,500,000 killed, over 4,000,000 wounded and 600,000 missing, of whom at least 200,000 were actually dead. Human misery caused by the war of 1914–18 continued to afflict the people of France right up to the outbreak of the present war. Hundreds of thousands of crippled and blind, families without breadwinners, wives without husbands, children without fathers were constant reminders of the years of war.

But reckoned in terms of the power politics of the French imperialists, of the value of the shares of the big owners of French heavy industry and of French banks, the results were quite different. The French ruling class obtained considerable economic and political benefits from the Treaty of Versailles. The economic benefits of Versailles were the return to France of the big heavy industry and the rich resources of Alsace-Lorraine, the control of the Saar coal basin (which was placed under a League of Nations Mandate which meant, in fact, control by Britain and France, since they were the victor powers and had a controlling influence in the League of Nations), reparations (in terms of money and goods) from Germany, the chance to oust Germany, her most formidable capitalist rival on the continent, from the markets of east and central Europe, and lastly new markets and sources of raw materials in the colonies which France had freshly taken over.

Politically, France emerged from the war as the strongest

capitalist state on the continent of Europe. All the countries of eastern and central Europe which had become economically dependent on Britain and France, and which in fact owed their very existence to the Treaty of Versailles, formed close links with French imperialism. In order to safeguard her position against Germany (and also in order to carry out her plans of unleashing war on the Soviet Republics) France built up a system of alliance with the states of eastern and central Europe such as Hungary, Poland, Rumania and Czechoslovakia. France's world position was strengthened by the acquisition, as colonies or as mandates, of countries such as Syria, Lebanon, the Polynesian Islands, parts of German West Africa, formerly colonies of the powers defeated in the World War.

During this period also France, of all the imperialist powers, was the chief instigator of war against the Soviet Union. In 1919 French and British troops without any declaration of war occupied Archangel and Murmansk. In 1919 a French fleet (with some British ships) was sent to the Black Sea, and British and French troops were landed in Odessa and Transcaucasia. The war against the Soviet Union finally had to be called off on account of the rising wave of protest of the French workers at home and of the feeling in the army and navy (which reached its highest point in the revolt of the sailors of the Black Sea Fleet under the leadership of André Marty). But even after this, and until the rise of the Nazis in 1933, the French ruling class seized every opportunity which they hoped would lead to the Soviet Union being involved in war, and in 1929 and 1932 it looked as if the plans of the French rulers would actually succeed. But they did not come off, thanks to the preparedness and growing strength of the Soviet Union, and to the resistance of the French workers.

As a result of the new markets and sources of raw materials acquired by France and of the need for rebuilding and restoring to economic life the devastated areas of north-eastern France, French capitalism was able to build up further industry at home, and to carry through mechanisation and rationalisation

in industry. In relation to certain other imperialist powers, France's position was stronger after than before the last war. According to Varga and Mendelsohn four of the main imperialist powers including France increased or decreased their industrial output in 1913 to 1929 as follows :

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Great Britain .. .. .. | minus 1 | per cent. |
| Germany .. .. .. | plus 13 | ,, ,, |
| France .. .. .. | ,, 38 | ,, ,, |
| U.S.A. .. .. .. | ,, 70 | ,, ,, [1] |

So we see that while the total output of British industry actually fell during this period, that of France increased considerably, and the increase in question was three times as great as that of Germany. But while this increase compares favourably with the change in output of some other industrial states, *from an absolute point of view French industry still lagged far behind that of Britain, Germany and the U.S.A., and was later to be outstripped also by that of the Soviet Union.*

In 1929, for instance, the total output of the French coal industry was one-third of that of Germany, one-quarter of that of Britain, and one-tenth of that of the U.S.A. And despite all the economic advantages of France and the fact that Alsace-Lorraine had been returned by Germany to France in accordance with the Treaty of Versailles, French steel production in the post-war years was still barely more than half of that of Germany, as the following table shows:

*Output of Steel of France and Germany*

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1913 | Germany .. .. .. .. | 19 million tons |
| | France .. .. .. .. | under 5 million tons |
| 1929 | Germany (minus Alsace-Lorraine) | 16·2 million tons |
| | France (plus Alsace-Lorraine) .. | 9·7 million tons [2] |

The French ruling class was still pursuing its policy of relying on a restricted market in which high prices were protected by even higher tariff walls. As a result of this protectionist policy of the dominant section of the capitalist

[1] Varga and Mendelsohn, *New Data for Lenin's Imperialism*, p. 302.
[2] D. N. Pritt, *The Fall of the French Republic*, p. 21.

class, French foreign trade declined catastrophically during this period. While this deprived France of both industrial and consumers' goods she might otherwise have had, and ruined many of the smaller tradesmen and industrial concerns, what foreign trade was maintained was mostly cornered by the biggest concerns which were as a result able to maintain and even increase their profits. This restriction of industry was undoubtedly also connected with the much closer link-up which existed between French capitalism and the international monopolies. The French bourgeoisie now took part in no less than thirty international monopoly agreements.

*Thus 1914 had not solved the contradictions which existed between France and the other imperialist powers but on the contrary had sharpened them.* During the period 1918–1933 there was a very lively competition between France and Germany for the markets of Europe, a competition in which France was the loser. The French capitalists warred with their rivals over the Rhine for the control of the rich and powerful industries of the Ruhr. At the same time Britain, in order to preserve her domination over the continent, played off France against Germany, which Britain protected against the more rapacious designs of the French imperialists.

*These, together with the production figures quoted above, are the realities behind the fiction of France as a strong imperialist power, with which many people, including above all large sections of the French people, were bedazzled until it was shattered by the events of 1940.* In fact, although France was temporarily able to play the role of a strong power in Europe as a result of the Treaty of Versailles, French capitalism was coming nearer to the time when it would have to choose between being a vassal state of British and American capital or a vassal state of German capital.

### *The Strengthening of Monopoly inside France*

The economic advantages which France gained from the war (together with certain other factors which there is no space to describe) led to a strengthening of monopoly at home.

The industrial districts of north-eastern France were restored after the war and many new industries were set up. The *Encyclopædia Britannica* tells us that in the years after 1918 the French learned to make, or improved their technique of making, certain industrial products such as high speed and special steels, and dyes, and acquired the manufacturing rights for various engineering and electrical machines from other countries. In addition a number of foreign-owned industries settled in France, including agricultural machinery, motors, turbines, heavy electrical machinery, artificial silk, and boot and shoe industries. The mechanical equipment of French industry, especially the use of machine tools, was improved and modern methods of mass production were introduced in many industries.

At the same time the railway system was overhauled, big improvements were made in roads, docks, warehouses, and the general equipment of ports, and the hydro-electric capacity of France was increased from 647,000 kilowatts in 1912 to 2,000,000 kilowatts.[1]

Improvements were also introduced into agriculture. As a result of the use of fertilisers and better wheat soils the average production of wheat per hectare rose from 13.5 quintals in 1901–9 to 16 quintals in the years after 1918.

Production was further concentrated in large units. The number of workers employed in establishments with over 50 employees rose from 1.9 million in 1906 to 3 million in 1926. During the same period the number employed in establishments with over 1,000 workers increased from 500,000 to 900,000. In the great factories of Schneider and de Wendel, in each case, 40,000 workers were employed.

But alongside the comparatively small number of big concerns employing hundreds of thousands of workers, there persisted well over a million tiny concerns either owned and worked by the same man or employing a very few workers.

However, these small concerns counted for very little in the economic life of the country, as far as influence and ability to stand up to post-war conditions were concerned, but were

[1] *Encyc. Brit.* 1929, Article on France.

during this period increasingly ruined and driven out of business by the big trusts which now completely dominated France. A few big industrial and financial groupings in fact controlled industry and agriculture, markets and raw materials, and as a result of their great wealth and tight organisation were the real rulers of France. Out of 15,000 share companies which existed in France after 1918 only about 200 really counted. These 200 concerns included 30 banks and other financial concerns, 30 iron and steel, 30–40 electricity, 30 mining, 20 insurance, 10 chemical manufacturing, 10 water and gas companies, together with the big railway companies. These enterprises, including both banks and heavy industries, tightly linked together by various organisations and by shares and directorships held by the same families, formed the " protected sector of industry ", which by reason of its organisation, its control of markets and raw materials and its power over the state itself, was able to accumulate more and more factories, trade and profits in its hands, pile up fabulous wealth at the expense of the lesser industrialists (the " unprotected sector of industry "), and the working and middle classes. The unprotected sector of industry included some of the lesser iron, steel and mining concerns, together with the big shops and hotels.

The biggest and most powerful grouping of industrial concerns was the Comité des Forges, which comprised three-quarters of the total iron and steel industry of France, and of which the best-known leader was de Wendel. It included half a dozen well-known companies such as de Wendel, Marine et Homecourt, Schneider, Longwy, Devain-Anzin, Nord-Est. It had an aggregate nominal capital of over £100,000,000 and its profits in prosperous years before the war averaged £5,000,000.

The employers in the " protected sector of industry " were organised together in the Confédération Générale de Producteurs Francais, within which were special confederations for shipbuilders, weavers, chemical manufacturers and other sections.

The banking oligarchy was mainly included in three groups.

First, the Bank of France ; second, the four big credit banks (Crédit Lyonnais, Société Générale, Crédit Industrial et Commercial, Comptoir d'Escompte); and third, about a dozen private banks including those of Rothschild and Verne.

The extreme concentration of wealth and power in the hands of a few families is exemplified by the organisation of the Bank of France. The Bank of France is ruled by a council of twelve regents. According to the constitution (laid down by Napoleon who founded the bank in 1803) the governor, who is a member of the Council of Regents, and two other members of the Council must be appointed by the state, while six members must be chosen by the bankers. The latter are chosen by a committee of 200 which is automatically made up of the 200 biggest shareholders. The governor has the right of veto. But it is also laid down that the governor must possess a certain amount of shares in the bank. Thus the governor must already be a rich man when he is appointed, or he must be favoured with a loan from the bankers on whom he becomes dependent. The governor knows that he has the choice of resisting the bankers in the interests of the people and being faced with a debt which he cannot repay at the end of his term of office, or of becoming the servant of the bankers and passing after his term of office into a comfortable directorate in one of the big banks. The latter fate, as one would expect, has been the more usual one for the ex-governors of the Bank of France.

By means of the Bank of France and the various industrial associations, and by means of their agents in many of the permanent state departments, the French ruling class, the 200 richest families in France, hold the state firmly in their grip.

Some of the ways in which this control is exercised are illustrated by the following statements of representatives of the ruling class. The President of the General Confederation of French Producers said in 1919 (the year of its foundation):

> We should no longer limit our efforts to the defence and protection of the daily interests of our respective industries. The duty revolves on us of bringing the country

back to a proper sense of realities, and of awakening public opinion—a public opinion which speaks and acts and is therefore *capable of giving the government the strength to fulfil the mission with which it is charged.*[1]

An employers' delegate more recently explained the aims of the organisation in these terms:

The Confederation of French Producers is able to intervene as often as may be required by approaching individual deputies or Commissions of the Chamber of Deputies, in order to secure the introduction of amendments, in the interests of general prosperity, to bills and schemes which fail to take economic realities into account.

By such means and many others the French ruling class was able to exercise complete control over the government, sabotage any measure which menaced their interests, get rid of any individual or any cabinet which was dangerous to them. Thus in 1924 the Cartel des Gauches, the Left Bloc, was elected as a majority in the Chamber of Deputies after the financial crisis into which the country had been plunged by the previous right wing majority. Successive cabinets were appointed by the House to take measures to deal with the financial crisis. One after another these cabinets fell before the stubborn opposition of the financial oligarchy, until finally the representative of the bankers, Poincaré, was made Prime Minister.

It is not surprising that post-1918 France, ruled by an oligarchy so powerful both economically and politically, was characterised by an accumulation of wealth in the hands of a very few families at the top of society, side by side with an increasing impoverishment of the mass of the people. In Chapter I facts and figures were quoted showing the division of wealth and land in the France of 1918–39. One indication of how the wealth of the big bourgeoisie increased at the expense of the prosperity of the people is given by the rise in the national debt from 220 thousand million francs in 1920 to 355 thousand million in 1935.

[1] My italics —C.C.

Every section of the community except the big bourgeoisie was hit by the fall in the value of the franc, and the consequent rise in the price of necessities of life, which was not accompanied by a corresponding increase in wages and salaries. The middle class, which for several decades previously had been growing in numbers (largely thanks to the increased wealth of an imperialist France) stopped growing, and from 1930 began to diminish. In 1932 there were 100,000 fewer small traders than in 1930 and 500,000 fewer small taxpayers with an income of less than £135 per annum. On the other hand the working class had grown considerably. There were now 13 to 14 million wage earners, of whom 6 million were industrial workers and 2,700,000 agricultural workers. Together with this the predominance of agriculture in the French national economy was coming to an end and, as was mentioned in Chapter I, by 1930 the population of the towns equalled that of the countryside.

The conditions of the much larger working class were on the whole appreciably worse than those of the workers before 1914. Kuczynski sums up the conditions of the French workers during this period as follows:

> After the World War labour conditions undoubtedly became worse, real wages decreased, intensity of work increased immensely—especially owing to the reconstruction and rationalisation process applied to French industry with the means of extra profits derived from exploiting the German worker.[1]

According to the same writer the gross real wages of the French non-agricultural workers after the first world war changed thus (1895 = 100):

| *Year* | *Ratio* |
|---|---|
| 1914 | 112 |
| 1922 | 122 |
| 1929 | 105 |
| 1935 | 112 |

[1] *Labour Conditions in Western Europe*, p. 104.

### *The Formation of the French Communist Party*

The experiences of the war, the worsening of conditions, the greater economic and political oppression of the people and the numerical growth of the working class were the combined causes of a big growth of working-class activity and consciousness after 1918. Towards the end of the war there were movements of revolt within the army on the western front, repressed with great severity, and there was increasing industrial unrest. Such was the mood of the workers that the government in 1918 was forced to grant the eight-hour day, an aim for which the workers had been striving for half a century. In 1918, as a result of bad conditions of work, scarcity of goods, and the hardships caused by the difficulties of the change-over from war to peacetime economy, big strikes took place. In 1920, in order to obtain better conditions but also in protest against French intervention in Soviet Russia, two big waves of strikes took place. In February, the railway workers struck and were joined by workers of many other trades. In April a great wave of strikes held France in its grip: railwaymen, miners, metal workers, dockers, builders, and many others took part. The membership of the trade unions had grown rapidly during the year and a half after the war, and in January, 1920, it reached two and a half million.

The workers were at this time also finding their way towards a greater political understanding. Many difficulties stood in the way of this. The anarchist and syndicalist trends among the workers were still strong. But despite this the Socialist Party increased its membership from 35,000 in 1918 to 100,000 in 1920. In 1920 at the Congress of Tours the majority of the Socialist Party voted for adherence to the Communist International. Thus the French Communist Party was formed. The minority at the Congress who did not agree with the decision split away to form the new Socialist Party.

Thus the first step had been taken towards the creation of a unified, disciplined party, firmly based on the principles of

Marxism and rooted in the masses of the French working class, which was essential if the latter were to win their struggles and if the alliance of the peasants and workers, without which a " strong, free and happy France " cannot arise, was to be built.

But, as Maurice Thorez remarked in his autobiography, *Son of the People*:

> But there remains for the Communists a long road to be covered, a hard apprenticeship to be served in order to get to know and to appreciate, as men of politics (en hommes politiques) the reality which surrounds them, to acquire experience of the struggle, to learn to win in the specific conditions of France.

In fact the whole period from 1920 to 1932 was a period in which the Communist Party was slowly being forged into a party capable of leading the workers, in which the most advanced workers were learning to overcome their sectarian and leftist illusions.

But already during this period the Communist Party distinguished itself for the uncompromising stand for the interests of the working class and its loyal adherence to internationalist principles. In 1923 the Communist Party alone stood out against the occupation of the Ruhr and the oppression of the German workers by the French imperialists, and as a result of the work of the party there were cases of French troops fraternising with German workers and refusing to shoot down strikers in German towns.[1] At this time Marcel Cachin and other leaders of the party were arrested. At the elections of 1924, at a time when the reactionary Chamber of Deputies elected in 1919 had helped to bring about a severe financial crisis and caused distress among wide sections of the people, the Communist Party proposed a united front of the working people of town and countryside against big capital, and while this proposal was rejected by the Socialist Party the Com-

[1] It should be noted that the suppression of the movement of the German workers at that time by the British and French governments actually helped the German industrialists and Junkers to maintain their power, thus preparing the way for the second world war.

munist Party's policy was endorsed by 700,000 workers' votes. In 1925 the Communist Party alone protested against the colonial war started by the French imperialists in Morocco. It organised workers' conferences against the war in the big towns, and called a protest general strike in which 900,000 workers took part. The stand made by the party to defend the economic conditions of the workers, and against the worsening conditions which the capitalists were trying to impose on the workers, resulted in its receiving 1,400,000 votes at the general election of 1928. Another indication of the increased support given to the Party at this time was the sale of its paper *L'Humanité* which averaged 172,000 in 1927, and between 250,000 and 350,000 in 1928. Yet despite the advances made by the French working class after the war, there was from 1918 to 1932 an unbroken succession of reactionary governments which trampled on the interests of the people at the order of the "two hundred families" and which, though threatened from time to time, were never bowed by the action of the people.

The main reasons for this state of affairs were that the working class had not yet acquired a firm leadership or overcome the opportunist and sectarian weaknesses of the pre-war period. The great wave of strikes of 1919 to 1921, which had indicated not only economic discontent but a mood of revolt against the existing social order, died down again because there did not yet exist a firm, politically mature leadership of the working class which could have organised and given political direction to what was still largely an instinctive revolt against intolerable conditions and the suffering of the war years. Without such a leadership the movement of the workers could not be joined up with any movement of the peasantry and the town middle class.

Thus in the end the strikes of 1920 failed to secure for the workers the improvements in living conditions for which they had fought and made sacrifices. There was demoralisation in the ranks of the trade unionists and towards the end of 1920 membership of the trade unions began to fall. In 1921 the government decided without effective protests to ban the trade

unions. But it did not carry out its threat as renewed prosperity put a temporary end to industrial unrest, thus making extreme measures unnecessary for the time being. But at no time after 1920 until 1936 did trade union membership reach the height of January, 1920.

Along with this the opportunist influence, which had weakened so much that the majority of the 100,000 strong Socialist Party had voted for affiliation to the Communist International, again grew strong. 1920 marked the beginning of a period when there was the deepest split in the ranks of the working class both politically and industrially. Alongside the two parties, the Communist Party and the Socialist Party, there were two trade union centres, the C.G.T. (Confédération Générale de Travail) and the C.G.T.U. (Confédération Générale de Travail Unitaire). The former was strongly under the influence of the old syndicalist trends and was to some extent influenced by the Socialist Party whilst the C.G.T.U. members were mainly militant workers supporting the Communist Party. During this period the leadership of the Socialist Party, who had refused to accept the decision of the Tours Congress and had brought about the split in the working-class movement, refused repeated appeals for unity against the common enemy. In 1925 Socialists were members of the government which started the colonial war in Morocco and which imprisoned leading members of the Communist Party for their attitude to the war. But during the whole period the Socialist Party was able to get more votes than the Communist Party at general elections.

But undoubtedly opportunism would not itself have been able to influence the workers to so large an extent had it not been for the big weaknesses which existed within the Communist Party. The majority of militant workers did not for a long time understand how to make a right approach to the workers who supported the Socialist Party, how to win them for united struggle by taking up with them the simple issues which affected their daily lives. On many occasions they showed that they did not yet understand when and when not to strike in order to heighten the political consciousness

of the workers and not to discourage them by fruitless sacrifices, not to create a gulf between the most militant workers and those less politically conscious. And there was as yet no serious attempt to understand the lives and aspirations of the peasantry, and to bring about a united struggle of all sections of the people against big capital.

These sectarian weaknesses were accentuated by the hunting down and imprisonment of almost all the most experienced and finest leaders of the Communist Party between 1928 and 1932. While the latter were in prison, the leadership of the party fell into the hands of the leftist Barbé-Célor group, which did its best to alienate the working class from the party, with the result that in the elections of 1932 the party lost several hundred thousand votes.

But the trials and errors of this period, the wealth of experience gained, the hardening of leaders in the fight against French imperialism and in conditions of semi-illegality, were shortly to bring results. The world economic crisis which began in 1929 spread to France and brought about a situation in which the party, now steeled and mature, was able to play a leading role in uniting the vast masses of the French people against big capital.

## CHAPTER V

### The People's Front

Between 1934 and 1936 there came into being the "Popular Front of Peace, Bread and Liberty" uniting all the most progressive Frenchmen, and a government of the Popular Front was elected. France, previously one of the strongholds of imperialism and anti-Soviet intrigues, was to become for a time, next to the Soviet Union, the most progressive and democratic of the major countries of the world.

How did this great change come about? We can say that this change was, on the one hand, the response of the millions

of patriotic Frenchmen to the policy of sections of big capital which was strengthening the Fascist powers abroad at the expense of France, undermining France's national independence and dragging France nearer to war ; and on the other hand it was also the response of the workers and of large sections of the middle class to the lowering of their standards of living by big capital during the economic crisis.

### *France and the World Economic Crisis*

The world economic crisis which broke out in 1929 came to France later than to most other capitalist countries. The French ruling class hoped that their country would escape the crisis as a result of high protective tariffs and a guaranteed internal market. But after the fall in the value of the dollar and the pound, France, which had previously been a " cheap " country, now became a " dear " country.[1] This event, together with the general economic conditions of the time, caused the overseas market for French goods to contract catastrophically ; an adverse trade balance of 1,000 million francs developed and imports of foreign goods into France declined.

Within France during the years 1929–35 there was a corresponding decline in the total national wealth. Wages, dividends, the sales of agricultural and industrial products and industrial production all declined. In 1929 before the crisis industrial production was 40 per cent. above the 1914 level ; in 1932 production was below the 1914 level ; in 1933 it rose slightly above this but in 1934 again sank below.

The hardest-hit industries were those producing luxury goods and the woollen, textile and silk industries. Formerly these industries had exported a good percentage of their products. Now there was serious foreign competition, particularly from Japan, whose goods could be sold in France more cheaply than French goods themselves. Other industries, particularly coal-mining, and the motor industry, employed fewer workers than before.

[1] That is, the rate of exchange for foreign currency, which had previously been favourable, now became unfavourable.

This crisis hit every section of the community during this period, except the dominant section of the capitalist class—those who owned the " protected industries ", who actually succeeded in increasing their profits at the expense of the rest of the nation.

The unprotected sector of industry—the smaller iron and steel concerns, the hotels and the big shops—lost heavily ; their profits declined from 1,000 to 400 million francs.

The peasants were severely hit by the crisis. Improvement of agricultural technique had enabled them to produce far more grain than was needed by the country. Thus, while France consumed annually an average of 88 million quintals of wheat, the grain harvest was normally considerably above this. In 1933 there was a bumper harvest of 105 million quintals. The peasants were forced to sell their corn that year far below the usual price (when they were able to sell it at all). The government fixed a legal minimum price, but as the big capitalist millers to whom the corn had to be sold refused to pay the legal minimum, the peasants were forced by circumstances to continue to sell their grain at a price too low to assure them their means of life.

In the following year the surplus grain of 1933 had still not been disposed of, but as the 1934 crop was somewhat lower the government rescinded the minimum price act.

As for the working class, the total income of all wage earners is estimated to have fallen by 24 per cent. between 1930 and 1934, whilst the total income of wage earners in industry and commerce is estimated to have fallen by 30 per cent. during the same period.[1] Certain people asserted at the time, in order to justify the paying of lower wages by the employers, that this was neutralised by the fall in the cost of living ; but, whereas the cost of living may have fallen by, at the most, 11 per cent. this time, the average wage fell, as has been said, by over 20 per cent.

But statistics cannot possibly convey a real idea of the hard times experienced by the French working class during the

[1] *Revue d'Economie Politique*, quoted by Thorez, *France To-day and the People's Front*.

economic depression prior to 1936. The real position was not fully appreciated by many until 1936 when, during the negotiations following the strikes which we shall later describe, even the employers' representatives declared themselves shocked by the extremely low rates of pay which existed in many trades and many areas. The payment of women was in many cases particularly disgraceful. It was by no means uncommon for women to receive between one franc and one franc fifty per hour (representing a pre-war purchasing power of 2d. or 3d.).

At the same time (1930 to 1935) official unemployment figures increased from 150,000 to 500,000, but as was pointed out in Chapter I,[1] this official figure represented a real total of about 1,500,000 unemployed in 1935, and many of these were receiving no form of relief at all.

Moreover many workers who were not actually unemployed were working short time. It was estimated that in 1934 only 57 per cent. of industrial workers were working 48 hours or more—in other words, 43 out of every 100 workers at this time were working short time for short wages.

The government joined in the onslaught of big business on the living standards of the people by imposing economy cuts on civil servants and by reducing the pensions of the war disabled.

### *The Threat of Fascism and War*

In 1933 and 1934 the economic crisis in France was still deepening. Unemployment continued to increase. Abroad, the fascist states, Germany, Italy and Japan, were preparing for war in order to win a larger section of the world's markets, raw materials and supplies of cheap labour.

In order to ensure the continuance of their power and prosperity the " two hundred families " needed to take more drastic political steps against the people of their country. The methods which they intended to use, the policy they wished to carry out, can be summed up as follows :

In the economic sphere the " two hundred families " planned to maintain their profits by still further driving down the

[1] See p. 13.

standard of living of the people, by imposing more wage-cuts on the workers, by cutting the interest of the small middle-class bondholders—in general, to use the phrase employed by the spokesmen of the ruling class, " by adapting incomes to economic realities."

At the same time the big French capitalists aimed to maintain their guaranteed internal market by high tariff barriers to prevent the entry of foreign goods into France, despite the effect that high tariffs would have on the standard of living of the people.

In the political sphere such measures were in the circumstances of the time inevitably bound up with a turn towards fascism at home and abroad. In order to safeguard their position in society, and at the same time to carry through measures which were against the interests of the common people of France, the " two hundred families " began to pursue a policy of friendship and appeasement towards Germany and Italy, making concessions in particular to Germany which later enabled the Nazis to destroy the lives and liberties of Frenchmen. And at the same time the French ruling class, with the active help of Germany and Italy and with the connivance of the British government, began to prepare openly to impose fascism in France. Fascist organisations were formed such as the Croix de Feu, the Action Française, and the Francistes. These organisations had the same distinguishing marks as similar bodies in Germany and Italy—uniforms, paramilitary organisations and discipline. They adopted the same tactics : demagogic appeals particularly to the middle classes about the " financial plutocracy " and Jewish influence, while taking care not to infringe the real interests of the plutocracy.

A great agitation was started by the fascists against the Chautemps government which held office in 1934 on the grounds that this government was implicated in the Stavisky financial affair (one of the many financial swindles for which French capitalism has been notorious, and one in which very many small investors lost their money). The fascists carried out a series of outrages in Paris, in no way hindered by the

police whose chief was the pro-fascist Chiappe. The latter was finally asked to resign from his post but at the same time was offered an important post in Algiers. The fascist leagues used the dismissal of Chiappe as the pretext for an uprising in Paris. On February 6th, 1934, they attempted to occupy the Chamber of Deputies, the Palais Bourbon, and thus overthrow the government and seize power. All day long the fascists fought bitterly against the police and Republican Guards in the centre of Paris. At the end of the day they were beaten off with many killed and wounded on both sides. The coup had failed but the Chautemps government, yielding to the fascist pressure, resigned soon after and was superseded by a more reactionary government under the premiership of Doumergue. There can be little doubt that the two hundred families intended the Doumergue government to be the first stage in the transformation of France into a fascist country : they expected the Doumergue cabinet to play the same role in France as had the Brüning emergency régime—a semi-dictatorship with fascist leanings which had prepared the way for Hitler in Germany.

But the two hundred families had reckoned without the French people who showed great determination to defend their liberties and to unite together irrespective of party and creed in defence of the Republic. The French Communist Party called a demonstration on the Place de la Concorde in Paris for February 9th to show the strength of public opinion against the fascist activities which threatened the Republic. But it was not communists alone who responded to this call. On February 9th great numbers of Paris workers, socialists, communists, and many of no particular party marched and fought side by side to defend themselves against the violent attacks of the police who on that occasion seemed unable to distinguish between the enemies and the friends of the Republic.

This was followed on February 12th by a one-day general strike in which four and a half million French workers of different political opinions took part (including 90 per cent. of the postal workers, 80 per cent. of the teachers, and 75 per cent. of the workers in metal industries).

These were the first important indications of the great realisation which constantly grew from this time on among large sections of the workers and middle class of the need for united action against fascism.

During the rest of 1934 many hundreds of meetings took place at which the need for unity against fascism was debated and affirmed, besides many other forms of public activity which expressed the popular will to defend the Republic. In many cases these activities were initiated by the Communist Party, but to an increasing extent supporters of the Socialist and Radical Parties and progressive Frenchmen of no particular party eagerly engaged in these activities, for the simple reason that all were equally and in the same way concerned with the issues involved. Leaders of the Socialist and Radical Parties also played an increasing part.

In addition the success and popularity of the growing united movement was based on the fact that the people were fighting not only for the broad political aims of defending democracy and preventing war but also for their day-to-day economic interests, for their jobs and their wages, for a decent standard of life all round.

Thus in common action in defence of elementary democratic liberties and on other questions affecting the lives of the working people the united front of workers was forged—the indispensable preliminary for the People's Front. At the 1934 Congress of the Socialist Party one-third of the delegates voted in favour of sending representatives of the party to Moscow to discuss with the Communist International terms of an agreement with the French Communist Party. Later in the year the feeling of the rank and file of the Socialist Party had become overwhelmingly in favour of such unity, and the Pact of Unity was signed between the Socialist Party and the Communist Party.

But the French working class by itself, whatever degree of unity and political consciousness it might attain, could not hope to defend successfully the French Republic and the material interests of the French people. It was urgent that the seven million members of the French middle class should also be

won to unity with the workers in support of such a policy—a policy every bit as much in their interests as in those of the workers. Only thus, through the combined efforts of the two largest classes of the French people, could fascism be defeated in France.

Indispensable for unity with the middle class at the time was an agreement with the party which was the main representative of the opinions of this class—the Radical Party. In 1934, on the occasion of a Radical Congress at Nantes, Maurice Thorez, Secretary of the French Communist Party, held a meeting in the same town at which he explained the communist proposal for a " People's Front of Peace, Bread and Liberty." Of course right-wing leaders of the Radical Party, such as Herriot, who represented the interests of high finance rather than of the French middle class, could not be expected to be enthusiastic for a policy of unity with socialists or communists. On the other hand the hundreds of thousands of " little men "—small peasants, shopkeepers and others who formed the solid mass basis of the Radical Party—were genuinely alarmed at the threat of fascism and eager to find a way of answering this threat.

During 1935 the fascist Croix de Feu became increasingly active. A monster fascist rally was held at Algiers in which 30 aircraft took part. Rallies of a semi-military character were also held in many parts of France.

In reply to this and to other signs of the fascist danger the Radicals and the Socialist and Communist Parties drew closer together. In May, 1935, some candidates of the Left in the municipal elections received the support of all three parties. In July, 1935, a meeting was held to celebrate the victory of Professor Rivet, one of the successful anti-fascist candidates, which was addressed by the leaders of the Radical, Socialist, and Communist Parties—Daladier, Blum, and Thorez. And that same year, on July 14th, the traditional day of the Republic, a great joint demonstration was called by all the most important anti-fascist organisations in the country. These included the Radical, Socialist, and Communist Parties and the two trade union organisations—the C.G.T. and the C.G.T.U.

By the autumn of 1935 there were many indications that the Croix de Feu, backed by powerful elements among the ruling class, might attempt to seize power and to overthrow the Republic. This was of course denied by the right-wing press and politicians which through all this period deliberately minimised the danger with which the Republic was threatened. The majority of Radicals, far from disbelieving the reports about the plans of the Croix de Feu, took the fascist menace very seriously. At the Radical Congress in the autumn of 1935 the following resolution was passed :

> It welcomes with joy the powerful rally throughout the country determined to block the road to the enemies of the Republic—a rally which constitutes a wholesome and legitimate defensive front with which the Radical Party has loyally co-operated since July 14th, 1935.

Without specifically mentioning either the Socialist or Communist Parties the Radicals thus endorsed the principles of the People's Front " against the enemies of the Republic ", and guaranteed their participation in such a front.

Thus the Popular Front was formed. Already in September, 1935, the programme of the People's Front was published. This was not a socialist programme. It was a programme of progressive reforms, which could command the support of the whole people apart from the two hundred families. It included such proposals as the following : measures against the fascist leagues ; abolition of press censorship ; trade union rights for all workers ; school-leaving age to be raised to 14 (previously it had been 12) ; application of sanctions against aggressor states ; and steeply graduated income tax. No such measure as the nationalisation of the main industries, which would have seemed socialist to the Radicals, and thus have alienated them, was proposed in this programme.

While the People's Front was in process of formation, working-class unity was being consolidated. The two trade union federations, the C.G.T. and the C.G.T.U., had at this time 600,000 and 300,000 members respectively. The leaders of the C.G.T. were at first opposed to the unification of the

two bodies. But by the end of 1935, 100,000 railwaymen were united in one trade union and a great deal of local united action had developed in other trades. In March, 1936, a conference took place at which negotiations were started for the amalgamation of the two trade union centres. This trade union unity, too, like the unity of the Socialist and Communist Parties, was achieved in the face of the sabotage and obstruction of such men as René Belin and Dumoulin, who were later to become collaborationists in charge of the nazified unions of Vichy.

In 1936 the elections for the Chamber of Deputies took place and the candidates of the Popular Front received a clear majority over those of the parties of the centre and right. A Popular Front government was formed under the premiership of the Socialist leader, Leon Blum. Thus the People's Front had arisen and come to power. What was the People's Front?

In its essence the People's Front was an alliance between the workers and the middle class, particularly the peasantry, against the power of big capital, for the protection of the interests of both the workers and the middle class, and for the defence of the French Republic against the enemies at home and abroad. It was just such an alliance as Marx, more than half a century before, had declared to be an indispensable condition of the forward march of the French people. That the People's Front was an alliance of this sort was confirmed by Daladier himself who, as leader of the Radical Party at that time, was also a leader of the Popular Front. In 1935 he said :

> The Popular Front is the alliance of the Third Estate[1] and the proletarians. When the Third Estate and the proletarians are united, they achieve '89, '93, '48, the 4th of September. When they are divided, the attacks of Thermidor, Brumaire, and the 2nd of December are made against them.

The People's Front was supported by such large sections of

[1] In the States General, the parliament of France before the Revolution, the Third Estate represented the middle class.

the people because its programme provided for the satisfaction of their greatest needs. The workers supported it to defend their wages and conditions of work, to defend their parties and their trade unions against destruction by fascism, to defend a France in which the road would be open for the future achievement of socialism.

The professional people supported it to defend their careers and their salaries, their freedom of thought, their ability to put their talents to the building of a free and happy France living in peace, and not a France of fascism and war.

Many small shopkeepers and the peasants supported the People's Front against the big trusts, who refused to pay the peasants a fair price for their corn and wine, who sold goods to the small retailers at exorbitant prices, and who deprived the small shopkeepers of their customers by driving down the purchasing power of the workers.

All these sections fought together to defend the French Republic and its revolutionary traditions—a republic which despite all its weaknesses was the outcome of their struggles and a starting point for further advances. The character of the People's Front, the great significance for the future of France, can best be understood from an analysis of the events of June, 1936. June, 1936, represented the crowning achievement of the People's Front : it was the month of what was probably the greatest popular movement since the Great Revolution of 1789 : a month in which hundreds of thousands of Frenchmen entered political activity for the first time in their lives.

During the first week of June, 1936, when the government was in process of formation after the return of the Popular Front majority to the Chamber of Deputies, over one million workers came out on strike. This was a new kind of strike, where the workers neither went home nor smashed up their factories, but where they remained in occupation of the factories, maintaining discipline and keeping their factories clean and in good order. Sympathy with the demands of the strikers and an eagerness to support them in practical ways gripped large sections of the population. Local committees were

formed to provide food for the strikers and their families ; small shopkeepers everywhere made generous gifts ; progressive municipalities supplied hot meals and other assistance. The Radical *Œuvre* wrote on May 31st, 1936, when the main strikes were just beginning :

> Everywhere there has been an excellent spirit of solidarity : small tradesmen, civil servants, manual and brain workers have spontaneously come to the assistance of the strikers.

A review of the newspapers of the time gives an idea of the atmosphere of elation and immense confidence which seized the French people during that month of June. The newspapers were full of reports of strikers holding dances, concerts and sing-songs in the factories and playing football in the factory grounds, while there were many photographs of strikers standing together giving the clenched fist salute.

What could possibly give rise to such a tremendous popular upheaval seemingly in so short a time ? How did the French people suddenly gain such confidence in their own powers ?

To some degree it was a reaction against the economic conditions, the low wages and long hours which we have previously described—conditions which gradually getting worse over a number of years had now become intolerable.

But it was more than a mere reaction to economic conditions. The workers were able to win their demands because they had achieved unity both politically and through their trade unions, because they had succeeded in electing a government which they felt would stand by them and fight with them instead of opposing them as previous governments had done, because they felt that at last the moment had come when thanks to unity and a progressive government they had a golden opportunity to achieve their aims and to improve very considerably their conditions of life.

Thus thousands of workers all over France who had previously not even belonged to a trade union joined the strike movement, presented their demands to their employers—such as shorter hours, higher wages, and recognition of factory

representatives—and won their demands. In fact the strike movement started and reached its greatest height in industries where previously relatively few workers had been organised. Thus the strikes which preceded and led up to the main strike wave took place in the aircraft industry at Brequet and Le Havre during the first week of May—a hitherto poorly organised industry.

For this reason it can be said that the strike movement was by no means inspired from without, but was a spontaneous reaction of the working class to a situation in which progressive unity and a bold united policy showed them the path of their advance.

The suddenness and unexpectedness of the movement caught the French employers off their guard. In the face of the unanimous will of large sections of the people and the resolute and disciplined movement of the workers the French ruling class was paralysed. Many employers had only to be threatened with strike action by their workers to make them agree to the workers' demands.

Representatives of the Federation of French Employers and the now united C.G.T. met at the Hotel Matignon in Paris and signed an agreement, henceforth known as the Matignon agreement, which met many of the main demands put forward by the workers. And following this legislation was passed establishing the 40-hour week, 14 days' holiday with pay for all workers, collective agreements in all workshops, and only then were steps taken towards restoring wage cuts inflicted by the Doumergue-Laval decrees.

A common reaction among the British public at the time of the strikes was : why do the French workers embarrass their government by striking just at this time ?

The French workers in fact looked at this question in a different way. Thanks to the strikes which the French workers carried out, and thanks to other political activities of the people, the government was able to carry through a number of progressive measures, including a considerable part of the programme of the Popular Front, which would otherwise have been defeated by the forces of big capital.

In particular the strikes made certain that those economic measures most urgently required by the working class for the improvement of their conditions of employment were speedily enforced. Thus on June 6th, 1936, Blum's government met Parliament for the first time. On June 7th the Matignon agreement was drawn up, signed by the representatives of employers and workers, and countersigned by the government. On June 9th the proposed legislation regarding the 40-hour week, holidays with pay, and collective agreements was laid before the Chamber. On June 11th the Bills regarding collective agreements and holidays with pay received their first reading and were voted practically unanimously after the briefest of debates. The 40-hour week was voted the next day after the debate of eight hours. And within the next week the Senate, which in any other situation would undoubtedly have wrecked these measures, passed the three bills, taking the line expressed by one of its members that "it would not oppose the measures since it did not desire to run counter to the policy desired by the country."

The purpose of the stay-in strikes was also misrepresented and misunderstood by many people at the time. The occupation of the factories, it was said, was the first step towards their appropriation by the workers, towards a Soviet Revolution. In actual fact, the occupation of the factories during the strikes of 1936 had a much more limited aim—to prevent the use of blacklegs by the employers, to prevent the strikes from bringing the workers' jobs to an end.

Thus the People's Front was no mere coalition of leaders of parties. It was a living, dynamic form of the unity of the common people of many different shades of opinion, springing from basically common interests and aims. The people themselves through their strikes and through their Popular Front Committees which were set up in towns and villages all over France secured the democratic victories and the improvements in their living conditions associated with this period.

This support for the policy of the People's Front was no mere passing fashion. The wave of strikes in the summer of

1936 marked the highest point of popular activity on behalf of the programme of the People's Front, but throughout the years 1936, 1937 and 1938 the majority of the French people remained loyal to the principles and the unity of the People's Front. Late in 1937 new local elections gave a big majority to the candidates of the Popular Front, and it was only the weakness and betrayal of leaders combined with the tremendous pressure of the still powerfully entrenched bourgeoisie which brought about the final decay and disintegration of the Popular Front.

In June, 1936, the ruling class had been powerless to resist the demands of the popular movement which had grown with such astonishing rapidity. But from this time on the ruling class prepared to win back what it had lost, and eventually to disrupt and defeat the popular movement, and to carry out its plans of 1934 which had been delayed.

One immediate result of June, 1936, was to increase the organisation of French employers. Many small and previously unorganised employers now joined the Federation of French employers, and closely followed its directives in the relations with their workers. And since the C.G.P.F. was controlled by the big monopoly interests such as the Comité des Forges, this had the effect of bringing the small employers more tightly under the control of the bigger concerns.

The French employers for the most part regarded the Matignon agreement and the other smaller agreements which had been made in the summer of '36 as agreements which had been wrested from them against their will and by force. They therefore eagerly awaited their opportunity to do away with these agreements.

After their momentary defeat in June, 1936, the two hundred families prepared their counter-offensive. This could no longer be achieved in public, through Parliament, through demagogy, even through the arms of the fascist leagues. As Gignoux, the representative of the Comité des Forges, and the head of the Employers' Federation, said in June, 1936 :

> We have no intention of participating in the classic

parliamentary game, because the driving force for action quite clearly lies outside Parliament.[1]

Perhaps the most important tactic of the two hundred families was to attempt to divide against one another the different popular forces. They hoped to panic the middle class and the Radical Party into breaking the People's Front by raising doubts about the real intentions of the Communist Party, by spreading the belief that the communists intended to " sovietise France ", to deprive the small shopkeeper of his his shop and the peasant of his hard-earned land. They did their best, too, to divide Catholics from non-Catholics. The right-wing press carried lurid stories of atrocities against priests and nuns alleged to have been committed by the Spanish Popular Front, and tried to make out that the People's Front was directed against the Church.

This unscrupulous campaign of lies and misrepresentations which was aided by certain corrupt and pro-fascist elements within the Socialist and Radical Parties was not without success and contributed to some extent towards the break-up of the Popular Front.

But in addition it was necessary for the pro-fascists to use their great power over the banks and industries and in the departments of state to frustrate the people's will.

During 1936 they organised the " flight of the franc " : between 1936 and June, 1937, 70 milliard francs were transferred overseas by the bourgeoisie. The banks refused to subscribe for the " Baby Bonds " which Vincent Auriol had instituted for the small middle class investor. The nationalisation of the armaments industry was sabotaged and hindered in every way. When Blum attempted to secure special powers to deal with the financial situation the Senate refused to vote them, whereupon Blum resigned. Several cabinets were formed, none of which was able or willing to break the resistance of big capital. Finally Daladier was appointed premier, and while pretending to remain loyal to the Popular Front programme proceeded to deprive the workers of the

[1] D. N. Pritt, *The Fall of the French Republic*.

gains which they had won. In the autumn of 1938 Daladier destroyed the 40-hour week guarantees and at the same time the Radical Party, despite internal disagreement, withdrew from the People's Front.

The dissolution of the People's Front was quickly followed by the abrogation of the economic gains of the workers, the suppression of the working-class movement, and fascism. In June, 1939, Bonnet promised the German ambassador that the "Communists would be brought to book." In August, ten days before the outbreak of war, the communist papers, *L'Humanité* and *Ce Soir*, were banned. The story may be continued in the words of the Manifesto of the French Communist Party :

> Then came the period of the "phoney wars", with the persecution of communists whilst the agents of Hitler spied in the ante-rooms of the ministries—de Brinon in the Senate ; Laval in the Chamber ; Déat, Bergery, etc., in the General Staff, in the armaments plants and elsewhere. It was said at that time that the real war would not be against Hitler, but against the U.S.S.R. ; and all this time Hitler was preparing his blitzkrieg which was to lead our country to the most terrible debacle in its history, and was to make Pétain, Laval, de Brinon and Co. the beneficiaries of defeat, the assassins of the Republic and executioners acting on orders from the Boches.

After the declaration of war, communist workers were hunted down and sent to concentration camps, hundreds of trade unions were dissolved, the whole press was muzzled by a heavy censorship. On the other hand, known fascists such as Déat and Deloncle were suddenly promoted to high state posts. While at this time essential preparations for defence against Nazi Germany were being neglected, an anti-Soviet campaign was raging in the press, tons of arms were being sent to Finland for use against the U.S.S.R., and an expeditionary force for Finland was being formed.

With all the democratic organs of the workers smashed,

with the Communist Party banned, the stage was set for the betrayal of 1940.

But all the power of big capital would not have been able to inflict this defeat on the French people if the latter had been conscious of the real character and aims of the ruling class, and of the consistent struggle which was needed in order to defeat reaction. The French people had achieved much. But they had not yet achieved that insight into the movement of social forces which could enable them to withstand successfully over a long period the opposition of monopoly capital.

The illusions of the French people at this time were encouraged by the weak and corrupt elements within the Radical and Socialist Parties, elements which were not truly anti-fascist, and which feared to rely on the power of the people against that of big capital.

Blum, in 1937, when the Senate refused to give him emergency powers, could have appealed to the people against a body which did not represent them, and with their aid could have defeated the Senate and with it the power of the Bank of France and the two hundred families. Instead, Blum and his cabinet gave up the fight and resigned.

Similarly, Blum and a large section of the Socialist leadership must bear the responsibility for carrying out the policy of non-intervention which was completely inconsistent with all the anti-fascist principles of the Popular Front and which was opposed by very wide sections of the people in both Britain and France. It must be said that Blum on this issue preferred to bind himself to the facts rather than face the facts and have to fight against the two hundred families alongside the people. This policy reached its logical conclusion at the time of Munich, when only one Socialist Deputy in the Chamber voted against this infamous agreement.

A further weakness within the Popular Front was the failure of the Socialist Party to agree to consolidate the unity of the working class by the fusion of the Socialist and Communist Parties. In 1936, on the suggestion of the Communist Party, negotiations were started with this object in view. The

Communist Party put forward a number of fundamental propositions as the proposed basic programme of the new party. The Socialist Party took many months to reply to these propositions and refused to allow discussion on the question by their own rank and file. Later, on the proposal of the Socialist Party, negotiations were suspended and in mid-1938 Paul Faure, who was the Secretary of the party at the time, went so far as to send a circular to local organisations of the party, forbidding any joint activities with the Communist Party.

The last and decisive reason for the decline and fall of the People's Front was the great pressure put on the French government by international reaction. In particular, British reactionary pressure was one of the most powerful factors in disrupting the Popular Front.

The devaluation of the franc in September, 1936, which had the result of partly cancelling the wage increases won by the workers earlier in the year, took place after Blum had had telephone conversations with London and Washington, and took the form of a three-power agreement. In March, 1938, when the Nazis invaded Austria, France was warned by Britain that if she took military action Britain would not support her.[1] Finally, the whole policy of non-intervention was primarily the policy of the British Chamberlain government, and there was undoubtedly heavy pressure put on the Popular Front government to accept it.

Thus a terrible responsibility rests on the British working class which, at a time when the French People's Front was at its height, when the Spanish people were fighting against the armed might of Germany and Italy, and when the Soviet Union was using its powerful influence in the direction of collective security, failed to achieve unity at home, failed to unite the anti-fascist forces, failed to remove the Chamberlain government and to march forward side by side with the peoples of France, Spain, the Soviet Union and many other countries in a peace front which would have resisted the further spread of fascism and prevented war from breaking out.

[1] Werth, *loc. cit.*

*The Achievements of the People's Front*

Today the events in 1934 to 1938 in France are overshadowed by the more dramatic events of 1940 to 1944. But this should not cause us to overlook the very real achievements of the People's Front during the three years of its existence—achievements which must be understood if we are fully to understand the spirit and aspirations of the French people at the present time. An understanding of what the Popular Front accomplished can strengthen our confidence in the future of the French people.

In the first place the People's Front brought about an immediate and sharp improvement in the living conditions of almost every section of the workers and the middle classes. Many workers won an immediate rise in wages varying in normal cases between 10 and 15 per cent, and in some cases amounting to 50 per cent or more. The workers also won the legally guaranteed 40-hour week, and a fortnight's holiday with pay each year. Collective bargaining between employers and workers was legally enforced, and the election of shop stewards was recognised by law.

The peasants won the Grain Board.[1] The price of wine and corn was regulated by law and payment of debts was legally postponed in hard cases. The civil servants and the war-disabled benefited from the abolition of the economy cuts, and the small shopkeepers from the increased purchasing power of the workers.

Secondly, the People's Front broke the deadlock as between left and right which had existed in France for many years and greatly strengthened the progressive forces of the French people. Previously, since 1918, the proportion of votes cast for the left and for the right in French general elections had remained almost static, whereas in 1936 the left parties gained the support of 200,000 people who had not before taken part in a general election.

[1] The "Corn Bureau"—a department of state set up to give detailed attention to certain agricultural problems, and which was particularly concerned with ensuring for the farmers in all parts of the country the sale of their corn crops at adequate prices.

Thus the People's Front secured the coming to power of a much more progressive government than had existed for many years. In 1924 and again in 1932 left-wing majorities had been elected to the Chamber of Deputies but in each case moderate premiers had given way to reactionaries, Poincaré in 1926 and Doumergue in 1934. But in the case of the People's Front the government was elected on the basis of a specifically agreed progressive programme brought into being through the action, discussion and consent of hundreds of thousands of the ordinary citizens of France. And once in power the government was urged on to the implementation of this policy by the action of these same citizens.

Thirdly, the experience of the People's Front increased the political understanding and consolidated the organisation of the working class as never before. The Socialist Party increased its representation in the Chamber from 101 to 146 deputies, and the Communist Party from 10 to 72. The socialist vote remained practically the same, but the Communist Party increased its vote from 794,000 to 1,503,000. From 1932 to 1935 the Communist Party increased its membership from 20,000 to 75,000, and during 1937–8 grew further to nearly 304,000.

During the same period the closest possible relations were established between the socialist and communist workers. Old suspicions which had divided them were largely broken down, and negotiations were started for the complete fusion of the two parties, and the formation of a single party of the working class.

Even more rapid than the growth of the political parties was the growth of the trade unions. The membership of the united C.G.T. grew from the 900,000 which had been the total membership of the separate organisations before they amalgamated, to 5,000,000. Thus almost the whole of the French working class was drawn into the trade unions (the total number of industrial workers was 6,000,000). During the wave of strikes in the summer of 1936 sections of the workers never previously touched by the unions were drawn into the struggle. The girl assistants of the Galeries Lafayette and

other big stores in Paris, for instance, came out on strike and applied to the C.G.T. to have a union formed for them.[1]

Thus in France during the time of the Popular Front, not only was the split in the ranks of the trade unions healed, but the French workers became the most highly organised working class in the world outside the Soviet Union, with a membership larger than that of Britain or America, despite the much greater numerical size of the working class in these two countries. The political split in the working class was partly healed, unity of action was achieved and for the first time in the history of France a mass party of the working class developed—capable of leading the workers in the future through whatever trials and difficult conditions they would have to face, capable of building and strengthening the alliance of the workers and peasants which alone could guarantee the future of France.

This party was the Communist Party which throughout the whole period played a foremost part both in bringing together all parties and sections of the community which were to form the People's Front and in leading the mass action of the people which alone made its achievements possible.

Thus while in the years 1934 to 1936 there was a great and genuine desire for unity among progressive Frenchmen, the translation of this desire into real unity of action and into the form of definite agreements between the progressive parties was in a great measure due to the initiative of the Communist Party.

It is also necessary to note the special efforts made by the Communist Party to defeat the manœuvres of the pro-fascists aimed to divide the progressive forces. There were constant

[1] The following figures indicate the spectacular growth of union membership in certain industries in which the workers had been relatively unorganised before June 1936.

| *Union* | *Total Membership* | |
|---|---|---|
| | *March* 1936 | 1937 |
| Federation of Metal Workers .. .. | 50,000 | 800,000 |
| ,, ,, Textile ,, | 50,000 | 370,000 |
| ,, ,, Chemical ,, | 5,000 | 178,000 |
| Clerks and Shop Assistants | 18,000 | 220,000 |
| Foodstuffs Workers .. | 16,000 | 220,000 |

attempts, as has been mentioned earlier, to scare away the middle class from the Popular Front with stories about the Red Peril. There was a considerable danger that the big strikes in the summer of 1936 might be misrepresented. The Communist Party therefore used all its influence to ensure that the strikes were carried out in perfect order and discipline, and that the workers returned to their jobs as soon as an agreement with employers had been reached. The leader of the Communist Party, Maurice Thorez, pointed out to the workers that they " must know when to end a strike ". Thus the lie that the Communists were using the strikes to impose a Soviet regime on France was exposed, and the middle class as a whole was not alienated by the action of the workers, but on the contrary supported their struggles for better conditions.

Similarly when the pro-fascists tried to frighten other democratic parties by representing socialists and communists as the enemies of the Republic, the Communist Party replied to this by pointing out that the French working class, far from being enemies of the Republic, had always fought on the side of the Republican liberties, and was the truest heir of the great traditions of 1789 and 1848, which were symbolised by July 14th, the Tricolor and the Marseillaise.

There were also, as has been mentioned, attempts to split the progressive forces on religious grounds. The Communist Party, in this respect, too, was careful to avoid any action which might cause supporters of the Popular Front to play into the hands of their opponents. For many years past French reaction had succeeded in using religious questions to prevent many Catholic workers and peasants, particularly women, from joining the progressive forces. The Communist Party endeavoured to end this by putting forward the policy of the " main tendu aux Catholiques " (the outstretched hand).

Finally the pro-fascists of all countries were banking on the victory of Franco in order to encircle France with fascist states and in this way to weaken and endanger the independence of France. Here we should note that although wide sections of the French people fully supported the Spanish people's fight against international fascism, the Communist Party was in

fact the only political party which consistently fought against the shameful policy of non-intervention.

Fourthly, the People's Front enabled the French people to prevent the coming of fascism in the years 1934 to 1936, thus delaying fascism for five years, so that when it did come the anti-fascist forces were better prepared to struggle against it. Without the People's Front the fascist riots and the formation of the Doumergue government would undoubtedly have led to the triumph of fascism in France in a very short time. Maurice Thorez explained the danger which had faced France at that time in a speech which he made three years later in 1937. He recalled that at the local government elections in 1934 the Communist Party had gained while the Radicals had lost seats and the extreme right had also gained. There was danger in this situation for the French working class and for the Republic. The rapid polarisation of political forces might have led to the outbreak of civil war in conditions in which the working class would have fought alone against big capital and in such circumstances the workers would have been defeated. The People's Front which united the workers and large sections of the middle class, not for socialism, but against the aims of the most reactionary section of the ruling class, prevented this.

It has been said that the social programme of the People's Front, the cutting down of hours of work and the raising of the standard of living of the French people, contributed to the collapse of France by preventing the building up of French military might. In fact such a statement is precisely the reverse of the truth. It would be more accurate to say that the programme of the People's Front, had it actually been carried through, not only partially but in the letter and in the spirit, would have so unified the French people, would have so built up the national economy of France and so strengthened her position in the world as to have made completely impossible the catastrophe of 1940.

And in actual fact, as has been explained already, it was precisely the bitterest opponents of the People's Front, the representatives of the big trusts, who sabotaged the armaments

*programme as part of their efforts* to discredit and destroy the People's Front.

The role that the People's Front could have played in strengthening the French people and the treacherous acts in fact carried out by the big trusts together with Hitler's fifth column, are described in the Manifesto of the French Communist Party in the following words :

> After the general election of 1936, in which the Popular Front triumphed, it was a matter of urgency to put a stop to the crying social injustices perpetuated by the trusts (starvation wages, long working hours, no holidays with pay, no security of employment, violation of trade union rights, and so on). The peasants had to be assured of a sale for their produce at economic prices, and the small business man and artisan had to be defended against the rapacity of the big trusts.
>
> Realisation of such social reforms would give the mass of the people solid moral and material reasons to love their country, and to be ready to make any sacrifice in its defence. It was, in fact, a matter of bringing back into the service of their country—of a human and generous Motherland—the mass of the forgotten men whom big business had robbed of their place in the community of the nation.
>
> But Hitler and his fifth column were watching and waiting. *Had they allowed these plans to become a reality, France would quickly have become very strong ; manufacture of armaments would have developed at staggering speed, and the conquest of Europe by German imperialism would have been very much more difficult.*[1] Their main need, therefore, was to break the unity of all Frenchmen and disrupt the development of their productive effort ; and so we saw the most cynical sabotage of the new social policy on the part of the great trusts.
>
> The mineowners of the Nord and the Pas-de-Calais, who nowadays are exploiting the richest seams for the benefit of the Boches, deliberately set out to work unproductive seams

[1] My italics. - C.C.

in order to reduce the output of coal.[1] In the armament shops, work was purposely unorganised, workers were left with nothing to do, employers closed down factories when complying with the " holidays with pay " order instead of giving their workers holidays according to a roster. One of the leaders of the Metal Workers' Union in the Paris region, the young communist worker Jourdain, at this time published a bitter indictment of the sabotaging tactics of big business. Today these saboteurs collaborate with the Boches, while Jourdain has been handed over to the Gestapo by the Vichy police, and one can only guess what has become of him at the hands of the Nazi criminals.

The Communist Party of France denounced all these acts of sabotage, it denounced the scandal of the failure to carry through a scheme of aircraft production on the pretext that there was no aluminium supply at a time when bauxite was being sold on credit to Germany, and the Nazis were using it in their huge warplane construction programme. But the governments of the day were lacking in energy ; they fell for anti-communist manœuvres, and thus played into the hands of Hitler, whose fifth column, with such gentry as de Brinon, Laval, Déat, Deriot and Bergery, could act without the slightest let or hindrance.

## CHAPTER VI

### The Rebirth of France

Less than two years after the break-up of the People's Front the Nazi invasion resulted in the complete collapse of the Republic and completed the transformation of France into a fascist state.

The collapse revealed in the sharpest way all the weaknesses

[1] This and some other episodes referred to here took place during the occupation, when this manifesto was written.

of French social and political life, and the real economic and political backwardness, which had previously been hidden behind the façade of republican institutions and concealed by the carefully built up legend of France's strength and invincibility.

Almost overnight writers in the British press who had previously lauded the French war effort, the high morale of the French people and their enthusiasm for the war, the lofty aspiration of Daladier and the French ruling class, now discovered for the first time some of the fundamental weaknesses of French life which had existed all along. At the same time they discovered " moral weaknesses ", defects of the French character, which had never existed and did not exist, or at the most were gross generalisations. They indulged in gloomy speculations as to whether France would ever again take her place among the great nations of the world.

What these writers forgot was that these same weaknesses had at the same time been revealed to, and were being understood and taken to heart by, the French people themselves, and that precisely for this reason the fall of the French Republic, despite all the terrible disasters and sufferings to which it gave rise, had created the conditions for the rise for the first time in history of a France which would be in every sense a " free, strong and happy France " created by the people on foundations which could never be destroyed.

The fall of the French Republic exposed the political role of the French ruling class for all to see. Previously the real rulers of France had prepared their treachery behind the scenes. Though the French capitalists and their statesmen had consistently and for many years had dealings with Germany, and had always used their economic power in a flagrantly undemocratic way, the true significance of what they were doing had up to now been confused by the game of party politics in the Chamber, by hagglings over constitutional rights with the Senate, and by the infinite capacity for distortion of a corrupt press.

Now the machinations of the ruling class had been made public. How easily Daladier was succeeded by Reynaud, and

Reynaud by a cabinet of out-and-out fascists, including Baudouin, Ybarnegaray of the Croix de Feu, and Pétain ! (Baudouin, previously not a " political figure ", had been known as one of France's richest bankers and a close friend of Count Ciano.)

How easily, and with hardly a murmur from the elected representatives of the people, had the members of the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate—this completely unrepresentative clique—been able to sign an armistice with the Nazis, supposedly in the name of forty million Frenchmen ! How easily Pétain in his broadcast announcing the armistice slipped into all the familiar fascist catchphrases !

In such circumstances, no illusions could be entertained for very long by the masses of the French people about the character of the French ruling class and its politicians and generals, men like Laval, Flandin, Pétain, Weygand, Reynaud, Doriot, Déat, who were now revealed as the open supporters of capitulation to fascism. Events had thus provided the French people with living proof that they could never determine their own destiny without breaking the power of the two hundred families over the state machine.

Secondly the fall of the Republic revealed the true character of corrupt elements in all parties and classes of the French people, people who by their treasonable activities had aided the plans of the two hundred families and prepared the way for fascism. Such elements had been extremely strong in the leadership of both the Radical and the Socialist Parties. Such elements in the Radical Party had caused the latter to withdraw from the Popular Front in 1938. Such elements in the Socialist Party had sabotaged unity of action with the communists and had supported non-intervention and Munich with such cowardly slogans as " better slavery than death ". Now these same people were among those who, after capitulation, voted in favour of Marshal Pétain and the dissolution of the Republic. These were socialists like Paul Faure, and trade union leaders like René Belin, who now became head of the official Vichy nazified trade unions.

Thirdly and above all, the fall of the Republic created the

conditions for the rebirth of France by providing an aim for which all honest Frenchmen (that is all Frenchmen except the two hundred families and their corrupt lackeys in other classes) could unite—the liberation of France.

But of course the understanding of these truths could not come to the whole French people immediately, but only in the course of a hard struggle for liberation. The actual period of invasion, of the collapse of military resistance, and of the installation of fascism in France was a period of extreme difficulty for any kind of popular activity. The time which elapsed between the invasion of Holland and Belgium and the capitulation was five weeks. France was in chaos, with an army betrayed, disorganised and scattered throughout the land, with millions of homeless refugees, hundreds of thousands of families without means of subsistence, and many families with their members scattered, some to Germany, as prisoners of war, others divided between Vichy and occupied France, between which an almost impassable barrier had been erected.

This confusion caused by the physical circumstances was added to by the tactics of the occupying forces. At first the Nazis were polite and conciliatory and the civilian population was treated with courtesy. Germans took their turn in queues at shops, and requisitioned goods were paid for. Meanwhile the German press and radio preached the blessings of collaboration, promising that once Britain was defeated France and Germany would settle down to enjoy the benefits of peaceful co-existence and of cultural and economic intercourse. This German propaganda was faithfully echoed by the French collaborationist press.

Thus during the first few months of the occupation certain sections of the French people, in particular the middle class who had previously had illusions about France's invincibility, were now overwhelmed by France's shattering defeat and by the impending defeat (as they thought) of Britain. Thinking that victory over the Nazis could not be won, such sections accepted collaboration and hoped to make the best of it.

The same people were under an illusion about the role of

Vichy and thought that Pétain was a good man making the best of a bad job. A typical (though probably exaggerated) judgment of this attitude to Vichy was given by Pierre Tissier in his Free French pamphlet *The Nazification of Vichy France:*

> There can be no doubt that Marshal Pétain did, at first, have behind him the support of very nearly the whole nation, because the nation believed that he was capable of saving anything that might be saved in the international field and that he could rally such national energies as might be available for setting France on her feet.

It would probably be more correct to say not " nearly the whole nation " but " nearly the whole middle class ". An indication of the attitude of the workers towards the Vichy regime even from the beginning is the fact that this government, which had at first intended to instal itself at the industrial town of Clermont Ferrand, was dissuaded from doing so by the threat from the workers of that town to make " a new St. Bartholomew's night ".

Moreover, even those actions of public opinion which were at first deluded into support of Vichy were by no means pro-fascist in their intention, even though their illusions at that time helped to prop up a fascist government. And when later these sections of the French people discovered where the policy of Vichy was leading them, their attitude towards that government completely changed, as we shall see.

Even in June, 1940, a call was made to France not to despair and never to abandon the struggle against Nazi domination. This call came from General de Gaulle who, from London, declared :

> France has lost a battle, but France has not lost the war ! . . . That is why I urge all Frenchmen wherever they may be to unite with me in action, in sacrifice, in hope. Our country is in mortal danger. Let us all fight to save her. Long live France !

About the same time, within France, the Communist Party was distributing leaflets bearing these words :

The ruling class has brought our country to the brink of the precipice. Today when German imperialism is putting into practice its plan of enslaving France, all that the French rulers are concerned with is to save their privileges, their capital, their class domination. They are ready to sacrifice the independence of our country, to sacrifice the interests of our people. They are ready to come to terms with the conqueror, to use German bayonets behind which to shelter from the reckoning which an indignant people is preparing for them. . .

We Communists of France have always fought against capitalism, against oppression by the ruling class, against robbery and oppression of the colonial peoples. We have always fought against the robber imperialist policy of the French bourgeoisie towards other peoples, and particularly towards the German people. *With all the greater right, justification and strength will we fight against the enslavement of our people by foreign imperialists. The working class, the people of France, will never be reconciled to foreign enslavement.* As ever, under all conditions, so in present days of severe trials, horror and boundless calamities, we Communists have been and remain with our people. Their fate is our fate. *We profoundly believe in the strength and the future of our people, in the future of France.* Our people will not perish. Their will and their freedom-loving spirit will not be shattered by the dark forces of traitors, exploiters, plunderers and conquerors.[1]

From this time onwards two currents of resistance to fascism were growing—the Free French movement abroad and the underground movement at home. At first these developed separately, but as the hour of liberation approached they were increasingly merged together.

### *Growth of the French Underground Movement*

The development of the French underground movement may be divided into two stages. First the stage of slow preparation and organisation, the stage in which new sections of the

[1] My italics—C.C.

people, beyond the small minority, awakened to the possibility of active struggle against the invaders, national unity was gradually built up, various popular organisations were re-constituted, new ones were formed and increasing numbers of acts of resistance took place.

Second, the phase in which national unity was achieved and a nation-wide guerrilla army was formed and carried on armed struggle against the Nazis. This is the phase, in which the whole French people apart from a tiny number of traitors are taking part in one way or another in the struggle against the Nazis.

At the time of the collapse the leaders of almost all the former republican parties either turned out to be traitors or remained inactive, some through fear of arrest and others because they did not see what could be done. The organisations of the parties and trade unions had practically ceased to exist. During these few months there is no report of organised activity by any party except the Communist Party, which as far as was possible in such circumstances maintained its organisation throughout the whole period.

During these first few months, as Fernand Grenier relates in his pamphlet *Ceux de Chateaubriant*, the Communist Party was busy re-forming those parts of its organisation which had been put out of action and gaining contact with those members who had been "lost" during the disaster. Illegal literature was produced. On July 27th, one month after the armistice, the Communist newspaper *L'Humanité*, published illegally, told the workers of Paris to make the German soldiers understand that "a nation which oppresses others cannot itself be free."

It may be argued against the activities and the two statements quoted, that they are not positively enough anti-German, and seem more concerned with the misdeeds of the French ruling class than with the more dangerous enemy, German fascism. But as Fernand Grenier explains :

> This is to forget that at this period the demobilisation of the French armies of the free [i.e., Vichy] zone and notably

the Alpine Army is taking place. Among those demobilised are a certain number of Communist militants (all marked by the authorities) living in the occupied zone. These like the other demobilised men must be in a position to return to their locality and re-establish contact with the illegal organisation. A too forcibly anti-German attitude on the part of our first illegal leaflets would have run the risk of hindering our tactic of getting our organisation and our men into position.

But from December, 1940, onwards the secret communist press came out more and more openly against the Germans. On December 30th, 1940, *L'Humanité* asked :

> Where are French cattle going ? Where are our apples going ? Where is our corn going ? Such are the questions which the hungry people are asking. . . . . There is hunger in the homes of the poor, there is cold, and meanwhile the Abetzes and the de Brinons, the occupationist officers and the French capitalists are feasting and swilling champagne and warming their feet. . . . Our unity must make our strength.

As Fernand Grenier remarks in the same pamphlet, one might ask what other French party has a record of illegal activities at this time ? What other French party even dared to produce illegal papers at this time, let alone make statements such as those quoted above about the occupationists ? Those who criticise the French Communist Party and suspect it of being lukewarm in its opposition to the Nazis at this time should first of all answer this. And in fact, on October 5th, 1940, nine months before the Nazi attack on the Soviet Union, the Gestapo ordered the arrest by the Vichy police of 300 Communist leaders, including deputies, mayors and municipal councillors.

The first open street demonstration against the Nazis was made by the students of Paris who, on November 11th, marched to the Arc de Triomphe, were acclaimed by thousands of Parisians and machine-gunned by Nazi troops.

Several months later at the end of May and the beginning of June the first known mass action of the French workers against the occupation took place. More than 100,000 miners in the departments of the Nord and the Pas de Calais (that is, 95 per cent. of the miners in this area) went on strike. The Nazis started a reign of terror, 2,000 people were arrested of whom 1,000 were never seen again, local trade union leaders and Communist mayors were murdered.

The German attack on the Soviet Union on June 22nd, 1941, immediately had a great effect on the French people by revealing conclusively to the workers the nature of Vichy and the Nazis as the most reactionary and anti-Soviet forces and by showing the French people as a whole that the Nazis could be defeated. In the words of Georges Boris in the Free French publication *Public Opinion Since the Armistice* :

> The entry of Russia into the war last summer definitely roused the people and hardened their determination.

This marks also the beginning of the ferocious reign of terror imposed on the French people by the Nazis and Vichy right up to the time of their expulsion from France. The Nazi High Commissioner von Stuelpnagel issued a decree imposing the death penalty for printing, editing or distributing communist literature and threatening 25 years' imprisonment for anyone caught with such literature in their possession. The Communist Party replied to this by printing and distributing a manifesto in 300,000 copies. Shortly afterwards a patriotic demonstration took place in Paris at the Gare de l'Est. After these events the Germans shot twenty hostages and Vichy set up special courts, against whose sentences there was no appeal ; twenty men were tried on a charge of " terrorism " and three men, including Jean Cathelas, railwayman and Communist deputy for Amiens, were guillotined. But a few days later, to avenge the martyrs, the first detachment of franc-tireurs was formed, named after Jean Cathelas, in the neighbourhood of Paris, and a troop train was blown up killing 100 Germans and injuring about the same number.

From the end of 1941 wide sections of the French people

were drawn into active struggle against the Germans and known acts of resistance become too numerous to be recorded in detail. About this time news came through of widespread sabotage by the workers. In the last three months of 1941 over 200,000 workers in occupied France went on strike, most of them on demands for higher wages. In many factories sabotage and go-slow movements caused industrial production to fall by 20 or 30 per cent., and in some places by 50 per cent. Out of 2,000 lorries turned out by the Renault works at this time only 160 were in good condition.

The peasants also entered the struggle. Agents sent to requisition crops were killed, livestock slaughtered, produce was hidden, and the police chief of the Nord department is known to have made a public statement urging the peasants not to oppose requisitioning.

Housewives in a number of places demonstrated publicly against the shortage of food supplies.

At the end of 1941 and the beginning of 1942 the former democratic parties, in particular the Socialist and Radical Parties, were reconstituted and a number of illegal papers were started, representing many different political shades but all united in their resistance to the invader—papers such as *Vérité*, *Liberté*, *La Voix de Paris*, *Le Peuple de France*, *Le Feu*, *Valmy-Libération*, *L'Anti-Boche*, *La Guerre Continue* and *L'Ordre Nouveau de Servitude*. By this time national unity of all anti-Nazi parties had been established and a national committee representing the different underground organisations had been formed.

The breadth of the movement during 1942 can be seen by two events : a French archbishop appeared in his cathedral wearing the Star of David as a protest against the persecution of the Jews, and Herriot, formêr president of the Chamber of Deputies, returned his Legion of Honour insignia after this decoration had been given to volunteers of the anti-Bolshevik legion who fought for the Germans on the eastern front.

The movement developed still more in answer to the occupation of the whole of France by the German army on November 11th, 1942, and to the Anglo-American landing in North

Africa in December. The first of these events, to which Vichy made not even a show of opposition, completely demolished any illusion about Vichy which might still have been held by any sections of honest public opinion. This event swept away all political distinctions in France, drew together the whole French people into an indissoluble unity against the Germans and the handful of French traitors. In the clear unambiguous words of Fernand Grenier (January, 1943) :

> In France to-day there is neither Right nor Left in politics. You are either pro-Boche, or anti-Boche, anti-Vichy and a whole-hearted supporter of General de Gaulle.

At Toulon the highest officers of the fleet together with the rank-and-file soldiers and sailors and the working people of the port made their glorious common stand, symbolising throughout the world the French people's will to resist.[1]

From this time on the Francs-tireurs et Partisans became a nation-wide guerrilla army with military discipline, centralised command, and regular communiqués. Overcoming the greatest difficulties—lack of trained commanders, in most cases complete ignorance of guerrilla tactics, lack of arms, food and shelter and the necessity of maintaining the families of the fighters—the movement of the Francs-tireurs et Partisans (generally known as the F.T.P.) was built up. So widespread did the exploits of the F.T.P. become that on December 25th, 1942, the controlled press could no longer keep silent about them and *Gringoire* printed a description of how the F.T.P. were organised.

Contrary to what has been said in many British newspapers, it must be emphasised that like the liberation movement as a whole the F.T.P. was not a communist organisation and neither its leaders nor the mass of its fighters were confined to one party but were composed of patriots of all classes and all parties who wished to share in the liberation of France, although the Communist Party played a leading part in form-

[1] The officers and men of the French fleet based at Toulon scuttled their ships to prevent them from falling into Nazi hands. Their heroic action was aided by the workers of Toulon who delayed the German invasion with machine-gun and rifle fire.

ing and recruiting to the F.T.P. This fact was emphasised in a communication about the activities of the guerrillas which was sent to General de Gaulle by the National Military Committee of the F.T.P. in November, 1942 :

> The forces of the F.T.P. are composed of men, women and youths without any political or religious distinction ; workers, intellectuals, shopkeepers and peasants have joined together to achieve the same aim. Further the F.T.P. are receiving considerable material assistance from an increasing number of small businessmen and industrialists. Finally, officers and N.C.O.'s on the reserve lists are to be found in their ranks.

Finally, on May 22nd, 1943, the unity of the French people was confirmed by the establishment inside France of a National Council of Resistance representing all parties and sections of the French people and having on it a representative of the Free French movement.

The Council of Resistance was composed of representatives of the following organisations :

First, the resistance groups—*Libération Nord*, *Libération Sud*, *Combat*, *Franc-Tireur*, *Ceux de la Libération*, *Ceux de la Resistance*, *Organisation Cadre Militaire* and the headquarters of the F.T.P.F.

Second, the political parties—the Communist, Socialist and Radical Parties, the Popular Democrats, the Democratic Alliance and the Republican Federation (the three latter were before the war parties of the Right and Centre).

Third, the C.G.T. and the Christian trade unions.

Fourth, Monsieur X—a member of the French National Committee and Free French National Commissioner serving in France.

During 1943 the various partisan forces, including the F.T.P., came increasingly under a unified command. By D-Day the unified partisan forces had assumed the title of F.F.I. (French Forces of the Interior), but the exact details of the unification are not yet known.

The following facts about guerrilla activity in France shortly

before the opening of the Second Front were given by M. Viénot, the late French Ambassador in London :

> There were guerrilla forces operating in the Aisne, Jura, Savoie, Dauphiné, Cévennes, the Central Massif, Basses Pyrénées, Dordogne, Britanny, Argonne, Vosges—in fact everywhere where conditions favoured partisan warfare. In the Jura and the Aisne departments, the Germans had 5,000 men in action in February and 20,000 in April. In the Haute Savoie they had required 7,000 to reduce merely the Plateau de Glières. A small corner of the Dordogne had demanded the intervention of 5,000 picked men. In the Aisne the Germans suffered 500 dead, 700 wounded. . . .[1]

In the organisation of all this activity the Communist Party played an honourable part, and suffered heavy losses. The communist paper *l'Humanité* continued to appear the whole time although four successive editorial boards were discovered and executed. 10,000 members of the Party, including ten members of the Party's Central Committee were killed by the Nazis and Vichy. Leading members of the French Communist Party who have died in the struggle against the invader include Pierre Semard, councillor of the Seine Department and member of the Party's Political Bureau ; Gabriel Péri, a deputy and member of the Central Committee; Félix Cadras, municipal councillor of Calais and Central Committee member ; Jean Cathelas, deputy member of the Central Committee ; Michels, deputy ; Auffret, Le Gall, Frot, Grandel, Gardette, all Seine councillors ; Guy Moquet ; and many others.[2] The energy and initiative shown by French communists in their fight to build the resistance movement has won for the Party the respect of all sections of the people and many new adherents.

In a manifesto of which, in response to many requests for a statement of its post-war policy, the Party issued one million copies under the noses of the Gestapo, an appeal for new recruits was included, and an explanation given as to how recruitment was effected under conditions of illegality :

[1] *France*, May 2nd, 1944.
[2] The list is given in the *Manifesto of the French Communist Party*.

The Communist Party of France asks all Frenchmen and Frenchwomen who want to work for the unity of the French people, to liberate and rebuild their country, to join the Party, applying to those members of the Party whom they know. And the Frenchman who knows no one to whom he can signify his intention of joining the Party need only look for two neighbours, friends, or workmates,with whom he can constitute a *Party Group of three*, a group which will carry on propaganda for developing the ideas contained in this manifesto, a group which will organise the formulation of demands in factories and other places of work, and will recruit new fighters for the detachments of Franc-tireurs and Partisans.

These Party Groups of three, born of popular initiative, and formed either by old members of the Party who are isolated, or by new adherents, will, by their activity as communists, speedily attract the attention of the regional organs of the Party or of the nearest sections and liaison should be quickly established.

In the dark days in which we are living, the Communist Party of France has confidence in the initiative of the masses of the people to constitute *new Party Groups of three*, new cells comprising a maximum of *three groups of three*, plus a leading body of three comrades, and new sections branching out into one or more fresh localities, which will come later to take their place in the regional organ of the Party and reinforce the fighting potential of our great Party, for the greater good of France.

On the occasion of the adhesion of the French Communist Party to the Free French National Committee General de Gaulle sent a letter to the Central Committee, of which the following are extracts :

The arrival of Fernand Grenier, the adhesion of the Party to the National Committee which he has conveyed to me in your name, the putting at my disposal as Commander-in-Chief of the French forces of the valiant francs-tireurs that you have organised and inspired, these are so many mani-

festations of French unity, this is a new proof of your desire to contribute to the liberation and the greatness of our country. . . . Convinced that your decision brings an important contribution to the national interest, I sincerely thank you for it. Great efforts, great sacrifices will be demanded of you after all those which the members of your Party have already undertaken in the service of France. . .

With the setting up of the National Council of Resistance inside France the resistance movement of the French people reached what was at the time the highest possible level in a country such as France, where a virtually unarmed people, provided with almost no direct help from outside, was opposed by fully armed occupation forces.

The French struggle has international significance because it represents the highest degree of national unity which has been achieved in any country occupied by the Nazis, and the highest degree of mobilisation of the masses of the people for the struggle, except perhaps for Jugoslavia and the occupied areas of the Soviet Union.

Moreover the tying down of many Nazi divisions in France, the widespread attacks on the German army, the destruction of arms and other material needed by the Germans have made a substantial contribution to the total allied war effort (though nothing to what the French people could have done if they had received more arms from abroad).

### *Fighting France*

The growth of the Free French movement outside France may be divided into three stages, though these naturally overlap.

The first stage is that in which General de Gaulle rallied around himself soldiers, sailors and airmen who escaped from France and Frenchmen overseas, and won over to the side of Fighting France many of the French colonies.

During this period the Free French Movement was in the main isolated from the movement in France and tended to rely on what support it could get from ruling circles in Britain and

America. During this period it was not avowedly democratic and many Free French spokesmen claimed that their movement was "non-political".

General de Gaulle, a lifelong soldier, originating from a middle-class catholic family and by no means a socialist, will always be remembered and respected as one of the first Frenchmen and the first high commander of French forces anywhere publicly to proclaim France's will to resist.

On June 19th, 1940, General de Gaulle appealed to Frenchmen thus :

> It is the bounden duty of all Frenchmen who still bear arms to continue the struggle. For them to lay down their arms, to evacuate any position of military importance, or to agree to hand over any part of French territory, however small, to enemy control, would be a crime against our country.

During 1940 thousands of Frenchmen overseas flocked to the banner of General de Gaulle, forming the nucleus of a French army the aim of which was one day to take part in the liberation of France.

On November 29th, 1940, de Gaulle was able to sum up the achievements of Fighting France since June in these words :

> What results can we show ? Well, at this very moment we have 35,000 men under arms, twenty warships in commission, at sea, a thousand airmen, a number of technicians engaged in armament work, territories active on behalf of our cause in Africa, French India and the Pacific, important centres in all parts of the world, growing financial resources, newspapers, wireless stations, and above all, the certain knowledge that at every minute of the day we are present in the hearts and minds of our fellow countrymen in France.

On the other hand, at this stage there was no call from Fighting France to the French people to organise active resistance to the Nazis within their country. General de Gaulle and his followers seemed to have the conception that France would be liberated solely from without and that the forces

within France could do little but passively await the day of liberation.

The first magnificent declaration of de Gaulle himself showed this weakness ; it explained that France would be liberated by gigantic world forces which had not at that time entered the struggle but would presently do so, but did not indicate that the people within France would play their part in that liberation.

At that period many Free French spokesmen asserted that the movement was not precisely concerned with whether France after the war should be a democracy or a dictatorship, provided that the Germans were cleared out.

In his *Nazification of Vichy France* Pierre Tissier, discussing the attitude of Fighting France to the internal politics of Vichy, says :

> It would therefore have been our duty to continue in our attitude of complete detachment from the internal administration of France if the question had in fact been one which concerned France only [that is to say, one may assume, if Vichy had been merely a French fascist government and not a slave of German fascism].

And in April, 1941, Maurice Dejean, speaking at the Caxton Hall in London on " Free France and its Leader ", while saying that Free France wished to gather around itself all who desired to take part in the struggle, was clearly embarrassed at the thought that Free France might be supported by " extremists " of any kind and added :

> We do not seek after personalities who are too definitely marked in one direction or another.

The second stage began with the formation of the National Committee in London in September, 1941. In this period de Gaulle's movement received the support of the resistance, including the Communist Party, on whose behalf Fernand Grenier was sent to London. Official connections were established with the French underground movement, and

more positive declarations were made that the French people after the war must be allowed to choose their own government.

On September 23rd, 1941, the day before the setting up of the French National Committee, de Gaulle declared :

> The constitution and laws of the French Republic have been violated by the invader and his accomplices. Such violations are an everyday occurrence. We refuse to countenance them and are therefore obliged to improvise *de facto* an authority which we exercise as provisional custodians of the national heritage. This authority is a power delegated to us for the time being by the nation, a power which we exercise provisionally and shall hand back to the representatives of our country as soon as it is possible for them to be freely chosen.

### *North Africa and the Liberation of France*

The third stage in the development of the Free French movement began on December 12th, 1942, when Anglo-American forces invaded North Africa. The expulsion of the Germans from Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia—French colonial lands—opened up new possibilities for the French liberation movement. It would now be possible for a Provisional French Government, operating in the midst of Frenchmen on French colonial soil, to assist the struggle of the patriots in the homeland in a number of ways and to a much greater extent than previously.

A French Provisional Government in Algiers could help forward the liberation of France *directly* by sending arms and supplies on a large scale to the resistance movement, and by building up on democratic lines a French Army which could take part in the invasion of France.

Such a government could also help to create the political conditions for liberation by representing French interests in the international sphere ; by securing from other countries, and particularly from big powers, recognition of the struggle of the French people ; by fighting for the recognition of

French independence and democratic institutions once the Germans had been driven out ; and by striving to win for France her rightful place in determining the shape of the peace and the future forms of world organisation.

To assess the significance of events in North Africa, it is necessary to answer the question : to what extent were these possibilities, as outlined above, realised between December 12th, 1942, and June 6th, 1944 ? These events should therefore be considered from this severely practical point of view, and not as an " experiment in French democracy " or as showing the way in which French institutions could be developed in France after liberation, although the many discussions which took place between representatives of different sections of the French people, and the decisions taken by the French Committee of National Liberation at that time have undoubtedly had a considerable influence on the administration of France since it has been freed.

For a long time after December, 1943, the possibilities mentioned above were not realised. For many months events in North Africa, far from helping forward the struggle of the French people, actually made this struggle more difficult and caused dismay and consternation in France.

One of the main reasons for this was the reactionary colonial set-up which was extremely unfavourable to the growth of any big popular anti-fascist movement.

French North Africa is a colonial territory. Although there are some European inhabitants, it is inhabited largely by Arab and Berber peoples ; in Algeria, for instance, according to the 1926 census, Europeans numbered only 833,359 out of a total population of 6,063,496.

The country is economically very backward. There are few industries, and these are not well equipped. Most of the people get their living on the land, and although some of the land belongs to a native peasantry, there has been an increasing degree of colonisation in recent years in the course of which many native peasants have been dispossessed by the big French capitalist farmers. The estates owned by the French colonists are on the whole large and highly mechanised.

The general standard of living of native workers and peasants is extremely low. Only a small percentage of the people is literate, and in recent years little attempt has been made to improve the education of the native people.

Political democracy for the native peoples has been non-existent. There have been, in Algiers for instance, native members elected by a section of the natives to the local deliberative assemblies, but the proportion of these to European members has been low, thus giving the natives no real voice in the affairs of the country. In fact the real rulers of the country have been neither the European workers nor the native peoples, but the big capitalist farmers.

As one would expect, such a state of affairs gave rise increasingly to discontent among the native people. This grew strong before the war, and France's defeat in 1940 increased the desire of the people to be freed from French colonial oppression. At the same time, the low level of economic development and the low standard of education have in the past prevented the discontent of the people from giving rise to a strong and conscious people's movement. On the other hand, the Nazis have had some success in exploiting the national grievances of the people for their own ends since North Africa became an armed base of the democracies.

With regard to the French colonial rulers of North Africa, these, again as one would expect, hailed the Vichy regime and welcomed Nazi domination, which they thought best for perpetuating their backward and reactionary rule over the people of Africa.

Secondly, events in North Africa were for a long time influenced very much by reactionary circles in Britain and America, which feared the popular movement in France ; which opposed de Gaulle because of his connections with this popular movement and his uncompromising stand for the independence of France, and for the rights of the French people ; and which favoured a deal with Vichyites or any doubtful elements outside the genuine resistance movement.

Thus, for a long time previously, the U.S. government had maintained relations with the Vichy government but had not

given any form of recognition to the National Committee of de Gaulle, or the Committee of Fighting France which succeeded it.

American newspapers contained articles attacking de Gaulle for so-called leanings to " dictatorship " and " fascist tendencies ", while at the same time de Gaulle was charged with secret contact with the Bolsheviks and with receiving money from the Soviet government. As we shall see, this attitude was reflected in American policy towards French North Africa.

A similar attitude existed in certain circles in Britain, although perhaps not stated so openly as in the case of the U.S.A. Thus many articles appeared in the British press which tried to make out that perhaps Vichy and Marshal Pétain were after all in a difficult position and were not really so bad as might be thought.

The *Evening Standard*, for instance, wrote concerning rumours of Pétain's supposed desire to convene the French National Assembly :

> He is still a force to be reckoned with within France, added my informant, and his prestige and influence bend towards the Allies rather than the New Order or the wish to collaborate closely. To many millions of Frenchmen this old man stands as a symbolic barrier against the total penetration of ideas, rules and outlooks alien to ancient France.

Lastly, these influences were assisted by the existence of a number of people in de Gaulle's entourage, who were afraid to rely on the French people in their struggle against Vichyites in North Africa and British and American reactionaries, and who favoured a policy of waiting and passivity in relation to the struggle inside France.

Thus it happened that French North Africa was liberated almost entirely from without. There was no big united popular movement to ensure that political changes, the purge of traitors, should immediately follow liberation. On the contrary, those small bands of patriots who had by their

gallantry assisted the Anglo-American invasion found themselves in jail, while the Vichyites, who had aided the Germans, were for the time being left in their high offices.

Vichy generals and state officials kept their places under the direction of the avowedly anti-British quisling Darlan. Anti-fascists of all kinds, ex-international brigaders who had fought fascism in Spain, democrats sent out to concentration camps by Vichy and the Germans, remained in prison. Another Vichyite, Peyrouton, was made Governor General of Algeria. After Darlan's assassination General Giraud was placed in command as High Commissioner but did not as yet make a clean break-away from Vichy. No policy in North Africa could have had a more harmful effect on the underground movement than this. So hated was this policy by the French people, that the allied radio stations did not dare to mention it in their broadcasts to the French people, who for the first time in three years had to turn to the Nazi radio to learn what was actually happening.

This policy continued to hinder the work of the French patriots for a long time. As a first step towards the setting up of a provisional government in North Africa it was necessary for Giraud and de Gaulle to meet. For a long time de Gaulle was prevented from going to North Africa. Every pretext was used to discredit the French National Committee. This was shown by the British government's attitude to the conflict in Lebanon between the people and political leaders of that country and the French mandate administration which still included Vichyite elements. Without waiting for the French democratic government in North Africa to find a solution to a problem with which it, together with the people of Lebanon, were primarily concerned, the British government threatened to take control of Lebanon, and the British press, which found no sympathy for the millions of Indians who died of starvation under British rule, suddenly found that the French treatment of the Lebanese people was " intolerable " and backed up the threats of the British government.

Further, efforts were made to save prominent Vichyites from well-deserved punishment. Circles in Britain and

America tried to secure the release of Flandin and Boisson, and Flandin was praised in at least one British newspaper.

But gradually, under the pressure of the united resistance movement in France, with the aid of French patriots in North Africa, of the Soviet Union, and of progressive forces in Britain and America, things began to change. The will of the French people cut through the intrigues to keep Giraud and de Gaulle apart.

One of the first acts of the National Council of Resistance set up in France was to make the following declaration :

> They hold firmly to the declaration that the anticipated meeting must take place at the seat of the general government of Algiers, in broad daylight and between Frenchmen. Also,
>
> 1. Political problems cannot be excluded.
> 2. The French people will not allow de Gaulle to be subordinated to Giraud.

This statement went on to demand the setting up of a provisional government under the presidency of de Gaulle, and stated that whatever the results of the negotiations, de Gaulle was the head of French resistance as far as the patriots of France were concerned.

Thus after a long period in which the event was delayed by reactionary intrigues negotiations between Giraud and de Gaulle finally took place in Algiers, and as a result the French Committee of National Liberation was formed there. It was not yet fully representative of the French resistance movement, but it was the first step towards a provisional government of France.

The Committee was formed on June 3rd, with de Gaulle and Giraud as co-presidents. Its aims were set out in a declaration of which extracts are given here :

> The Committee directs the French war effort in all its forms and in all places. Consequently it exercises French sovereignty in all territories outside the power of the enemy and it ensures the conduct and defence of all French interests throughout the world.

> In conformity with the letters exchanged between General Giraud and General de Gaulle, the Committee will hand over its powers to the provisional government which will be constituted according to the law of the Republic as soon as the liberation of the metropolitan territory of France will permit and at the latest when the complete liberation of France has been achieved.
>
> The Committee makes a solemn engagement to restore all French liberties, the laws of the Republic and the republican regime and to destroy completely the regime of dictatorship and personal power which has been imposed on the country.

In the international sphere, the Committee was recognised by Britain, the United States, the U.S.S.R. and Canada on August 26th, as " the administration of overseas French territories which recognise its authority " (the British formula) or as " the representative of the state interests of the French Republic " (the Soviet formula).

The statement of the U.S.A. giving limited recognition makes a number of observations with regard to the way it thinks the Committee should function, and then goes on to say :

> On these understandings the Government of the United States recognises the French Committee of National Liberation as administering in those French overseas territories which acknowledge its authority.

The statement then says specifically :

> This statement does not constitute recognition of a government of France or of the French Empire by the Government of the United States.

This was a step forward, but the difference in the tone of the British, the American and the Soviet notes brought out sharply the difference between the clear, unambiguous recognition given by the Soviet Union, the limited recognition given by Britain, and the still more limited recognition by America.

The statements of the two latter governments did not yet give the French Committee of National Liberation the same status as the various émigré governments in London, many of which have far less claim to represent their people. Such an attitude was symptomatic of the reluctance of certain ruling circles in Britain and America to take a step which might commit them later to the recognition of an anti-fascist government in France itself.[1] However, a meeting between Giraud and Roosevelt followed, as a result of which America agreed to arm 300,000 Frenchmen.

At the same time, democratic liberties were gradually restored, and democratic political activity began to develop. The Communist, Socialist and Radical Parties and the General Confederation of Labour were reconstituted. Two congresses were held by the all-party anti-fascist organisation Fighting France—congresses which showed the tremendous awareness and anti-fascist determination of all sections of the French people, and which demanded the rapid punishment of Vichyite traitors in the hands of Free France and the supplying of arms to the patriots, along with progressive measures for the colonial population of North Africa (such as equal citizenship rights, measures of social insurance, opportunities for education). Moreover a number of democratic newspapers, including the Communist *Liberté*, were started up. In particular, the trade unions began to grow rapidly, until by April, 1944, the C.G.T. had 56,000 members in Algiers, and 115,000 in Algeria as a whole (members included both French and Arab workers) and the weekly paper of the C.G.T. was being printed in 40,000 copies.

Another important development of democracy was the setting up in Algiers, by the decree of the National Committee on September 17th, 1943, of a Consultative Assembly. This assembly was weak in so far as it could not exercise control over the French Committee, but as a body which represented all shades of anti-Nazi French opinion it certainly influenced the action of the committee to an increasing extent.

[1] Fortunately the strength of popular sentiment both in France and outside have, despite this, resulted in the recognition of the French provisional government by Britain and America.

The first session of the Assembly took place in Algiers on November 4th, 1943. The membership of the Assembly was at first limited to 84 members, of whom 40 were delegates from the resistance movement inside France. Other members included 12 (later increased to 20) members of the Senate and Chamber of Deputies, 12 representatives of the colonial empire and one Moslem. The Assembly included six Communists—three representing the Communist Party and three representing the Communist deputies in the former Chamber of Deputies. Slowly and hesitantly, after the will of the French people had been expressed again and again in resolutions from the resistance movement inside France and in representations from organisations in North Africa, and after a unanimous demand from the Consultative Assembly, the punishment of the traitors—the process known as "purification"—began. The first notable result was the trial and execution of Pierre Pucheu, formerly Minister of the Interior in the Vichy government, and of a number of Vichy gaolers responsible for the torture and murder of patriots.

At a much later date (the beginning of April, 1944) the National Committee was made more representative by the inclusion of two Communists. Fernand Grenier became Commissioner for Air and Francois Billoux Commissioner of State for Economic Co-ordination. For the first time in history representatives of the Communist Party became ministers in a French government—for the Committee is in fact the provisional government of France. But this was no mere partisan triumph. The inclusion in the F.C.N.L. of two representatives of the largest and most vigorous organised body of opinion in France was a striking demonstration of the unity of Frenchmen behind de Gaulle and the Committee, which considerably strengthened the case of the Committee in fighting to win recognition as the provisional government of France.

Even then the F.C.N.L. did not fully represent the resistance movement and the people of France. The representation of the Communist Party on the Committee was extremely small in comparison with the party's influence in France, and neither

the C.G.T. nor the powerful resistance organisation, the National Front, was represented in the government.

However, the F.C.N.L. was by now far more representative, and enjoyed far more support than any other government of a European country set up outside Europe, and there was no longer any reason why the Committee should not be fully recognised as the provisional government of France (so far it was recognised as such only by the Soviet Union).

The representative of the C.G.T. on the National Council of Resistance in France proposed that the F.C.N.L. should be urged to adopt the title of Provisional Government of the French Republic. This proposal was unanimously adopted by the National Council of Resistance, and was taken to the Consultative Assembly in Algiers which also adopted it. Thus the F.C.N.L. assumed the title of Provisional Government.

The growth of democratic life in Algiers, the beginning of the purge and the strengthening of the F.C.N.L. were accompanied by a general improvement in political conditions related to the struggle of the French people. We have already mentioned the colonial set-up in North Africa as one of the great hindrances to the growth of an anti-fascist war effort.

A number of progressive measures were now taken for the native people of Africa. Right from the time when the Committee of National Liberation was set up in North Africa the Communist Parties of Morocco and Algeria had been campaigning for equality of rights between the European and native peoples. They put forward a number of demands including the following :

(1) Equal pay for equal work.
(2) Equality of army pay and allowances as between French and native troops.
(3) Application of all social laws to all North African peoples.
(4) Improvements in food supplies and health service.
(5) Agrarian reform.
(6) Local-government reforms to enable natives to take part in the local administration.

For many months the Communist Party was alone in making such proposals. But then things changed. The Congress of Fighting France which met towards the end of 1943 adopted almost in their entirety the programme which had been put forward by the Communist Parties. Following this the Committee of National Liberation decreed the equalisation of the pay of European and native soldiers and N.C.O.'s. Then, on December 12th, 1943, General de Gaulle made a speech at Constantine in which he announced that citizens' rights (including the right to vote) would be conferred upon tens of thousands of Moslems before the end of the war. He also promised that a larger number of administrative posts would be opened to Moslems and that attention would be given to their material needs. De Gaulle's speech was followed by the setting up of a special committee which began to examine the questions involved.

Since then the Committee of Liberation has issued a decree which grants French citizenship and the right to vote to Moslems of certain categories, including former officials, holders of matriculation certificates and leaders of Moslem trade unions. The same decree also states that the National Constituent Assembly of France which is to meet after the war will fix the date for the granting of French citizenship to Moslems in general.

Although the awakening of public opinion and the decree mentioned here are steps forward, many immediate and urgent reforms need to be carried through before the native people of North Africa will enjoy conditions and rights which will win them for wholehearted participation in the war against fascism. And every step forward by the democratic forces in Algiers will be won in the face of the formidable resistance of the big colonials.

Discussions were also started on the steps to be taken to re-establish democracy in France after liberation. A draft of plans for the re-establishment of democratic institutions in France after liberation was prepared by the F.C.N.L. and submitted to the Assembly. This draft was turned down by the Assembly which produced a more progressive plan which was

in its turn adopted by the F.C.N.L. In general it was agreed that after the liberation of any part of France, the Provisional Government should rule until the complete liberation of France and the return of French prisoners of war made a general election possible. A Constituent Assembly would then be elected by the vote of all adult citizens, and would draw up a democratic constitution.

Thus conditions were slowly created in which the French patriots outside France could contribute more effectively to the liberation of their country. The transformation of the French army into a more effective fighting force was begun. On June 27th, 1943, a military committee had been set up with the aim of unifying the French Army. This process was extremely slow however. The French forces were divided into the forces commanded by General de Gaulle, built up around the nucleus which had left France in 1940 and the forces of the colonies which had declared themselves on the side of de Gaulle ; the forces in North Africa commanded by Giraud ; and volunteers who had escaped from France in recent periods. In Italy the French forces under General Juin distinguished themselves by their ability and heroism.

At the same time the peoples of the French empire were mobilised to a greater degree than ever before. In March, 1944, General de Gaulle spoke of 14 per cent of the African population being mobilised and since that date the Commissioner of War has mentioned 16 per cent, which is a higher percentage that at any time during the last Great War. Fernand Grenier, when appointed Commissioner for Air, reported that there were five aircraft factories working and employing 50,000 men, and that joint production committees had been set up after the British model.

Finally, as a result of repeated requests from the National Council of Resistance and of the pressure of the Consultative Assembly, the French Committee made increasing representations to Britain and America for more arms and supplies to be sent to the patriots in France, and the French Forces of the Interior were incorporated in the regular French forces.

*France Since D-Day*

Any doubts which may have been entertained by sincere people in Britain about the strength and unity of the resistance movement, or about the importance of this movement from a military point of view, have been completely dispelled by the achievements of the French nation since D-Day.

The French forces which entered their country along with the other invading armies have played a no less heroic part in the fight than the French Forces of the Interior. But it is with the efforts of the F.F.I. that we are concerned here, as a supreme example of what the common people, with little aid or direction from governments and defying the most ruthless and efficient terror of all times, can achieve with their own strength, audacity and organisation.

It has been estimated that the French Forces of the Interior held down during the fighting in Normandy no less than 12 German divisions. The *Observer* recorded in an editorial in July that " almost as many German troops are reported to be engaged in watching the French interior as the front in Normandy."

The F.F.I. also succeeded in delaying the arrival of reinforcements in Normandy at a time when delay meant the failure of the German plans of defence. Here it is worth while recording in detail what was perhaps the greatest triumph of the F.F.I. in this respect—their action against the division " Das Reich " soon after D-Day. This division was stationed well in the interior of France, between Monluçon and Clermont Ferrand. The F.F.I. discovered that the division was to be moved to the front. The information was sent to S.H.A.E.F., which replied: " Delay them for 48 hours."

> The F.F.I. arrived post haste from the surrounding countryside and from as far away as Paris and Lyons, and opened operations by changing signposts and killing despatch riders. In the ensuing confusion the division got bunched up south of Chateauroux. There, bombed by British and American aircraft, the tanks scattered, only to be attacked individually by the F.F.I. armed with Stens and petrol

bottles. The division limped as far as the Loire, barely 150 miles away, which it did not reach until 10 days after it had left the Montlucon area. It was there halted to reorganise and refit, and so lost at least another 10 days.[1]

Apart from assisting the invading armies by such means as this, and by sending them much valuable information, the F.F.I., as is known, actually liberated hundreds of square miles of France before the British and American forces could arrive—including the major part of central France bounded by the Loire, the Bay of Biscay, the Pyrenees and the Rhone.

But the crowning achievement of the French people during the two months which followed D-Day, both politically and in the eyes of the world, was the liberation of Paris by the people of Paris. The history of the present war has shown us through the examples of Leningrad, Stalingrad, and Warsaw, the tremendous possibilities offered to a defending army by a big city organised to resist to the last. There is no doubt that Paris, turned by the Germans into a fortress city, could have seriously delayed the advance of the Anglo-American forces, caused heavy bloodshed and casualties to allied forces, to the resisters within, and to the population of Paris as a whole.

Once again, as in 1789, 1848 and 1870, the people of Paris achieved a miracle—but this time with a speed, with perfect unity and organisation and with a complete success unprecedented in any earlier popular insurrection. By their liberation of Paris, the people of Paris showed, in a way that nothing else could have shown, the complete unity of the people in their determination to free their country, and their unquestionable ability to rule themselves and so become once more one of the outstanding nations of the world.

Thus it can be said that the organised struggle carried on by the French people in co-operation with the Anglo-American armies considerably speeded up the liberation of France, made possible the tactics of the allied command, and greatly reduced the sacrifices involved both for the allied forces and for the French people.

During this short period, the size of the F.F.I. grew by leaps

[1] " Resistance in France ", Algiers correspondent of *The Times*.

and bounds. By the beginning of August, according to Waldeck-Rochet, the F.F.I. had been tripled in the course of three months and now numbered several hundred thousand men,[1] and according to the *Evening Standard* of August 19th, Colonel Drumont, a high-ranking partisan officer who had just reached Britain, reported that the French underground army now numbered 500,000 and was slightly larger than France's regular peace-time army.

However, we should not leave this account of the achievements of the French resistance movement without being reminded of just what was involved for tens of thousands of Frenchmen in terms of personal suffering and anxiety in being a member of the resistance movement.

> For the men in it, Resistance means changing one's name, one's house, one's whole personality every few days ; living in distrust of one's neighbours ; keeping an ear perpetually cocked for the ring of the door-bell, which may signify the arrival of the Gestapo or the militia ; being prepared to make a dash for it ; waiting in vain at a street corner for a messenger who is vainly trying to arrive at the appointed time, and not daring for fear of arousing suspicion to wait more than five minutes ; getting news that four or five important leaders have been caught and wondering anxiously how much torture has wrung from them ; learning that three months' preparations may be rendered useless because Dupont cannot get any petrol or Durand cannot cross the frontier, or because the last consignment of arms was seized by the enemy ; and knowing all the time that unless one can commit suicide in time capture means torture and almost certain disclosure (because torture has been refined to such a point that any man's endurance can eventually be broken down) of the identity and whereabouts of the men on whom the safety of the organisation depends ; and knowing also that from the moment he joins the resistance movement, whether a man is caught or not, his family may be taken hostages and made the victims of inhuman reprisals.[2]

[1] *World News and Views*, 9. viii. 44.
[2] *Times*, 12. viii. 14.

The relations of the resistance with Britain and America are incomparably better than they were at the time of the invasion of North Africa in December, 1942. There are many signs of this change, which is precisely the result of the mighty strength and unshakable unity of the French people.

Thus soon after D-Day General Eisenhower's headquarters issued their first special communique dealing with the achievements of the French Forces of the Interior. And after a visit to Washington by General de Gaulle President Roosevelt announced that the United States would accept the French Committee of National Liberation as the *de facto* authority for the civil administration of France. Following this step, co-operation between the allied armies, the French Forces of the Interior, and the administration of General de Gaulle has been greater than many before D-Day would have dared to hope. De Gaulle was allowed to visit Bayeux at a time when only a small strip of Normandy had been freed, and a delegate from the French Provisional Government was sent to Bayeux and started to work together with the local Committee of Liberation. Shortly after the liberation of Paris the French Provisional Government was installed in the capital, the various political parties and resistance organisations continued to function, now in conditions of legality ; collaborators were arrested and dealt with by the people ; the collaborationist press was banned and newspapers of all democratic opinions entered on their legal existence. France was liberated.

The experiences which the French people have had during the war, their experience of the unspeakable horror of four years of German occupation, their experience of the role played by the trusts in betraying their country and in aiding the enemy in exploiting their people, these experiences—plus the fact that the French people have organised, united, struggled the whole time, and thus played a big part in liberating their country—have made the France of today a completely different place in very many ways from the France of before June, 1940, or September, 1939.

Previously, though the popular movements had been strong and had achieved many successes, France had always been

deeply divided. The two hundred families, and later the direct agents of Hitler, had prevented Frenchmen from working together to achieve a happy life. Workers had been divided from the middle class, socialists from radicals, catholics from communists.

Today wider sections of the French people than ever before are united about the way in which the main problems of the country must be tackled during the next few years. The vast majority of the people of France, whatever parties and creeds they may have supported in the past, are completely united about the three major issues which face their country at the present time—first, to complete the defeat of the Boche ; second, to punish those who betrayed France ; third, to ensure the independence and prosperity of France, neither of which conditions can be achieved without bold measures of social reconstruction.

And although there have been serious disagreements about certain aspects of the government's policy, the overwhelming majority of Frenchmen, and all organised bodies of French democratic opinion are agreed that a government headed by de Gaulle is today the only possible government of France.

The Provisional Government, at the time of writing, although it does not represent the different parties according to their real strength in the country (the Communists being the most heavily under-represented with only two ministers out of 22) does have the advantage of representing in some degree all the main trends of opinion in France. It includes three Socialists, two Radicals, two Communists, and one representative of each of the centre parties. The C.G.T. and some of the main resistance organisations are also represented.

The unity of the French people is also shown by the friendly relations established between the C.G.T. and the catholic trade unions, and between catholics and communists. The French catholic paper published in London, *Volontaire pour la Cité Chrétienne*, wrote the following regarding co-operation between catholics and communists :

> The divergence in theories between communists and catholics does not exclude joint constructive activity in the

economic and social spheres. Here it is above all a question of mutual tolerance and confidence.[1]

Co-operation between communists and catholics, representing the two strongest and most clearly defined ideological trends in modern France, can perhaps more than any other single thing ensure a future for the French people.

Lastly this unity of the people is expressed in the continued existence of the resistance organisations and councils, such as Combat, Fighting France, and also the National Council of Resistance, and the local Committees of Liberation.

These organisations, formed in the struggle against the Germans, and cutting across class and ideological divisions, can be a powerful means of solving also in a united way the reconstruction problems of France.

The France of before the war was thwarted by the existence of traitors, of the agents of fascism in places of authority everywhere.

The France of today is becoming and will increasingly become a France purged of traitors. The French people are rooting out the traitors both big and small, but in particular they are concerned with removing the traitors in high places, the agents of the two hundred families in the diplomatic service and in other high administrative posts, the quisling directors of big banking and industrial concerns. Amongst other quislings whose arrest has been reported are the Governor of the Bank of France, de Borsanger, and the Vice-Governor, Villard, the industrialist Francois Lehideux, who managed the Renault works during the Nazi occupation, the Prefect of the Seine Bouffet, the Vichy Minister of Education, and the editor of *le Matin*.

As yet the traitors are being dealt with slowly, but the resistance organisations have all demanded, along with strict precautions, justice and legality to prevent the punishment of innocent people, the swiftest and sternest measures against the traitors. In particular, the National Council of Resistance has passed a resolution to this effect.

[1] A commentary on two articles in *Combat*, one by Marcel Poimbeuf, one by Waldeck-Rochet

In pre-war France, whatever changes might have been desired by the people, their will was effectively thwarted by the two hundred families through their stranglehold over the state machine. Today the representatives of the trusts are being progressively eliminated from all positions of authority, while the people themselves are directly participating in the running of their country in hundreds of different ways. The people have tremendous opportunities of expressing their opinion and exerting pressure on authorities through the National Council of Resistance and the local Committees of Liberation. Indeed, so far as it is possible to tell at the moment of writing, effective local government is actually carried on by the local Committees of Liberation containing representatives of the different popular organisations. (The possibilities of advance presented by this can be more readily understood when we remember that in pre-war France democratic local government did not exist even to the same extent as in England.) For example, it is reported that the special local administration at Marseilles consists of 23 members—five Socialists, five Communists, five trade-union representatives (C.G.T. and Christian), five delegates of the resistance movements, and three representatives of the centre parties.

Meanwhile many factories and other undertakings (gas and electricity companies) whose owners were traitors have been taken over by the people and are being run by the workers themselves with the aid of their organisations. It has been reported, for instance, that in Toulouse the Liberation Committee has taken over the management of the factories. However, it must be understood that where enterprises are taken over by the people at the present time, this is done not as a socialist measure but in order to ensure production for the war-effort and to prevent sabotage by pro-fascist managements. More and more as time goes on it will be seen that the gigantic tasks of restoring French economy can be accomplished only by the greatest possible participation of the people in government and in the management of industry. To secure the most elementary needs of the country—the restoration of food and fuel supplies, the restarting of industrial production

and of road and rail transport—presents problems which no private employer or government can solve by themselves—which can only be solved by the French people through their organisations.

In the France of 1939 the armed forces were led and controlled by men of the type of Generals Gamelin and Weygand, and Admiral Darlan—incompetents, traitors, men faithful not to their country but to the most reactionary sections of the ruling class and through them to fascism.

In the France of today a new French army is arising, composed of men and officers who have proved their loyalty to France either by their flight from the country to join General de Gaulle or by their participation in the French underground struggle and in the general rising since D-Day. The core of this new army must be the French Forces of the Interior—the workers, peasants, intellectuals, and others who forged their own army, learned the art of warfare and developed their own leaders in the course of a hard and unequal struggle against an enemy highly skilled in war and armed to the teeth. An army built up from such forces, and starting from such traditions, will be a genuine people's army which will serve no ruling minority but will owe allegiance to the people alone. This is the view that has repeatedly been expressed by the resistance movement itself.

In the France of 1939 public opinion was confused and misled by a corrupt press, controlled for the most part not by the sincere representatives of different political viewpoints but by the unprincipled agents of the Comité des Forges, of the two hundred families, and of the Nazis themselves.

In the France of today a new press has developed. Of 30 papers published before the war in Paris only five exist today. Such papers as *le Matin*, *Paris Soir* and *l'Oeuvre* which continued to appear under German occupation have been banned and their presses taken over by the newspapers of the resistance movement. Stern regulations have already been drawn up by the Provisional Government to prevent the abuse of the press by the big financial interests and by traitors.

Similarly the political parties which exist today are in many

cases very different from what they were in 1939. The French political scene is no longer dominated by the Bonnets, the Lavals, and the Daladiers, by those who bowed their heads to the dictates of the big trusts, but by the men who, whatever their immediate political opinions, have been tested in the struggle against the Nazis, and who in many cases have remained in the underground struggle in France throughout the occupation.

Such a man is Georges Bidault, formerly editor of the catholic democratic paper *l'Aube*, before the war a fighter for resistance to fascist aggression and today leader of the National Council of Resistance.

In short, it can be said that a new type of French state is arising, not a state based on the rule of the financial oligarchy, but a state based on the unity and strength of the common people, of the workers and middle class of France, and supported by all honest elements in the population.[1]

The guarantee that the French people will know how to make use of these new conditions is to be found in the great new understanding of social realities which exists in France today. The French people have seen the role played by the trusts, first in betraying their country and then in helping the Germans to exploit it. They know how the Comité des Forges changed its name and placed itself at the service of the German war machine, how Michelin tyres were manufactured for the Germans, how the four big banks, Crédit Lyonnais, Société Général, le Comptoir d'Escompte, and the Banque National, created in 1942 a " Financial Association for the Development of Industry " which considerably facilitated the

[1] However, at present it cannot be said that such a state has already [illegible] is *in process of being formed as a result of the struggles of the people*, a[illegible] *opposition from reactionary forces still re-*[illegible] *in France*. On the one [illegible] and, the beginning of the integration of the F.F.I. in the regular army, an[illegible] the power and influence of the National Council of Resistance and of th[illegible] departmental committees of liberation, which have in many cases assu[illegible]ned the authority of local government, represent the first stages of the development of this new state. On the other hand, the maintenance at their posts in Paris of elements of the old judiciary, who helped to repress the workers' movement in 1939 and '40, and the attempt to disband the F.F.I. and the Patriotic Militia, equally represent the attempts of reactionary forces to prevent this new type of state from coming into being.

task of mobilising French industry and capital for the Germans, and which placed French industry at the disposal of the big German enterprises.[1]

Thus there is an overwhelming desire of all sections of French opinion, that the big banks and big trusts should be taken over by the people, in order to ensure genuine democracy for the people. General de Gaulle said in a speech at Tunis that new measures would be required in the future to raise up France and to guide her on the path of progress. More recently, when he received representatives of the trade unions at Algiers on May 1st, 1944, de Gaulle said :

> There will be no prosperity for us Frenchmen tomorrow, there will not even be independence, if French economy is not strongly guided in such a way that all our resources are exploited, not in the interests of such or such a group, but for the profit of the realm and of the national community.

A similar view was implied in the article in the French catholic paper *Volontaire pour la Cité Chrétienne* previously quoted (p. 122). Commenting on opinions expressed by the French communist deputy Waldeck-Rochet, the article states :

> The measures proposed by Waldeck-Rochet are moderate and would not result in curtailing the rights of the individual. The remedy is that the heavy industries, the monopolies, the trusts and the big banks who exploit the people and endanger national sovereignty should again become the common property of the nation.

Finally the need for far-reaching social changes in post-war France has been agreed on by the organisations of resistance inside France. A resolution passed in March, 1944, by the plenary meeting somewhere in France of the National Council of Resistance declared that the following are " indispensable reforms " :

(1) The establishment of a genuine economic and social

[1] These facts were mentioned by Etienne Fajon in a speech to the last session of the Consultative Assembly in Algiers, reported in *World News and Views*, 10. ix. 44.

democracy involving the expulsion of the great economic and financial oligarchies.

(2) The rational organisation of an economy ensuring the subordination of sectional interests to the general interest and freed from the dictatorship of the professions instituted on the model of the fascist states.

(3) The development of national production on lines laid down by the state after consultation with all the sections of the people concerned in this production.

(4) The return to the nation of all the big monopolised means of production, the sources of power, mineral deposits, insurance companies, and the big banks.

(5) Development and support of agricultural and artisan co-operatives for production, buying and selling.

This point was again stressed by General de Gaulle very recently when he said in a speech at Lille :

> Concentrations of industrial power which are known as trusts must not continue to exist, and it is clear that France will not return to pre-war social conditions. The State must control the resources of the whole French Empire.[1]

Such a new France will undoubtedly play a far more progressive role internationally than the France of before the war. In particular, the attitude of this France towards the French colonies will be entirely different. An indication of the profound change of attitude among Frenchmen towards the problems of the colonial empire was given by the Brazzaville Conference. This conference was called to make recommendations as to the post-war policy of France towards the colonies and it was attended by colonial governors—not a body of men which one would expect to be distinguished for its progressive opinions. Yet the Brazzaville Conference drew up a number of recommendations which included increased native representation in some form of parliament, plans for the development of the natural resources of the colonies, measures of social welfare and improved education with the eventual aim of wiping out illiteracy.

[1] *France*, 2. x. 1944.

We may be sure that if a conference of colonial governors could entertain such suggestions as these, the French people as a whole will insist on an enlightened policy towards the colonies which can be compared only with the policy of the Soviet government in 1917 towards the non-Russian nationalities which had previously been oppressed by the Tsars. This is one of the reasons why the French Communist Party advocates that many of the French colonies should not attempt to secede from France after the war but should unite in some form of democratic federation with the French people, based on an equality of political and economic rights. The Communist Party has proposed that France shall be governed by a parliament consisting of two chambers. One chamber should be elected by the people of metropolitan France alone and in the other chamber half the representatives should be elected by the people of metropolitan France and half by the population of the present colonial empire. (This of course does not exclude the possibility of each of the present colonies having its own elected parliament as well, to regulate the internal affairs of the territory concerned.)

Some people may be surprised that the French Communist Party does not insist on the present colonies exercising their "right to secede". But any realistic estimation of the political set-up within France after the war must lead to the conclusion that through federation and close alliance with France the peoples of the present colonies have the best and in fact an unrivalled chance to win genuine national independence and freedom.

Thus to sum up, the development of France today is a development towards what can be called "the democratic and social republic", a republic which will be socially very different from that of 1939, and which will be vastly more democratic. There have been tendencies among some French politicians abroad (and in the press here) to say that France after the war will need a strong authoritative government to deal with the difficult tasks ahead— the underlying implication being that democratic government is necessarily "weak" and that pre-war France was weak because she was too democratic.

*However, this is not the view of the majority of Frenchmen* to-day. A well-formulated answer to this viewpoint was given in the French Communist Party's Manifesto, to which reference has been made previously.

> The vices of French democracy, as we knew it, can only be corrected by a broader and more genuine democracy. *The weakness of the Third Republic did not lie in the control the nation could exercise over its governments, but in that it could not exercise a sufficient degree of control.*[1]

The events leading to the fall of the republic can, according to the French Communist Party, be accounted for as follows:

> In the absence of effective and efficient control on the part of the nation, the powers of money were able to warp the structure of democracy, corrupt politicians, thwart the will of the electorate, and provoke a veritable degeneration of the republic. . . . The remedy lies, not in the abolition of democracy, but in its perfection, in its enlargement.

### *Friendship with Britain and the Soviet Union*

The future of France must be greatly affected by France's relations with other states and particularly her relations with the Soviet Union and Great Britain.

Many French people have admired the Soviet Union since its foundation. In 1920, as we mentioned earlier, intervention against the Soviet Union was answered by a wave of strikes involving hundreds of thousands of French workers inside France and by the revolt of the French sailors in the Black Sea. By 1935, when the Franco-Soviet Pact of Mutual Assistance was signed, the mass of the French people realised that friendly relations with the Soviet Union were essential for the future of France.

However, as has been seen, there have always been powerful sections of the ruling class whose hostility to the Soviet Union was much greater than their attachment to their own country.

[1] My italics.—C.C.

As a result of their actions France, until 1932, was the foremost instigator of war against the Soviet Union. And even after 1935 the reactionary press of France consistently published vicious lies and slanders about the Soviet Union.

The same people in fact wrecked the pact of 1935 by the policy of appeasement towards the fascist powers and by their betrayal of Czechoslovakia, with whom France also had a pact of mutual assistance. So when the Soviet Union had to ensure herself against this same policy by the non-aggression pact with Germany, the French reactionaries used this as a pretext for an unprecedented outburst of hatred against her and for the time being succeeded in causing misgivings about the policy of the Soviet Union at least among the French middle class.

But even in this most difficult period, when the French ruling class was more concerned with making war against the Soviet Union than against Germany, many French people continued to believe that the Soviet Union was a firm friend of France. For instance, in 1940, when a rumour had started that Russia had entered the war, some regiments who had been retreating in disorder re-formed and went back into battle. In 1941, when the Soviet Union actually did enter the war, this, as we have seen, had the effect of tremendously strengthening French resistance.

The Soviet Union for its part has given many recent indications of its attitude towards France and its high regard for the French people. Even in 1940, at a time when it was necessary for the Soviet Union to maintain careful relations with Germany, Molotov spoke warmly of the French people and their revolutionary traditions in a speech which he made to the Supreme Soviet.

Finally, the Soviet government's recognition of the French Committee of National Liberation as the " representative of the state interests of the French Republic " in 1943 showed that the Soviet Union was the first great power to recognise clearly and unambiguously the need for a strong and independent French state after the war.

What of relations between France and our own country ?

In the past relations between the peoples of France and Britain have been marred by a number of factors—all of which are in fact not the result of any contradictions between the real interests of the British and French peoples but which reflect the policies of the ruling classes of the two countries.

There has been a long-standing rivalry between the British and French ruling classes. Fierce competition arose between the British and French capitalists in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries over spheres of colonial expansion, particularly in Africa. Only the greater threat to the interests of both powers of German expansion prevented the outbreak of war between Britain and France during that time, and drew them together in a war against Germany.

And after the last Great War, between 1919 and 1940, Britain constantly played off France against Germany and *vice versa*, in order to maintain the balance of power in Europe, thus safeguarding British imperialist domination of the continent.

Together with this, it must be noted that British influence in France has in the past very often been used not in a progressive but in a reactionary way. In this connection it is only necessary to mention the part played by British capital in imposing upon France the appeasement and non-intervention policy, and in causing the downfall of the Popular Front.

Particularly this last aroused anger in the masses of the French people, but was certainly not in the real interests of Britain. In most cases, particularly in the case of the pressure against the People's Front government, the British people themselves have suffered as a result of this policy.

Now today, when British forces have played a major part in the liberation of France, a heavy responsibility rests on the British people to ensure that the previous disastrous policies towards France, which have almost become a tradition of British foreign policy and which have been carried on, as we have seen in the last chapter, right up to very recent times, should be completely ended and that the future policy of Britain towards France should at all time be strictly in accord-

ance with the Atlantic Charter and the Moscow and Teheran Conferences.

To carry out the decisions of these conferences with regard to France three things above all are needed :

(1) To give to the French patriots every facility to take full part in the final stages of the struggle against Germany and Japan.

(2) To place no obstacles in the way of the development of French democracy or of the just punishment of the Vichy traitors and to hand over the latter, wherever they may be found, to the justice of the French people.

(3) To enable France to take her place alongside the great powers, Britain, U.S.A., and the Soviet Union, in shaping the peace that will follow victory.

Moreover, for a long time after the liberation of France, the French people will be in urgent need of all the assistance which can be given by the British people. Apart from the political task of building up from its foundations a new French state on democratic lines, apart from overcoming the remnants of Vichy power and influence during a war in which their land is being liberated, largely by the efforts of Anglo-American armies, the French people will face tremendous physical problems.

A plenary meeting somewhere in France of the National Council of Resistance reported in *France*, March 16th, 1944, expressed

> anguish in view of the physical destruction of the nation by organised pillage and famine, the keeping of thousands in prison camps, the deportation of several hundreds of thousands of workers, the imprisonment of 300,000 Frenchmen and the execution of more than 50,000 patriots.

Viénot, the late French ambassador and representative of the French National Committee to the British Government, pointed out recently that the death rate of children under one year had risen from 2 per cent. to 16 per cent. during the occupation and that more than 1 per cent. of the children in schools were suffering from tuberculosis.

We must see that " military policy " or the interest of the monopolies does not prevent urgently needed supplies of food and other necessities from reaching the French people.

*Conclusion*

We can tell from the facts quoted above that despite the political conditions existing in France today, the French people have a stern and difficult task before them, in order to achieve a really strong, free and prosperous France.

Ravaged by war and Nazi occupation for four years, her industry destroyed by the Nazis in retreat, sabotaged by the patriots or bombed by the R.A.F. in the course of the struggle, the towns of northern France laid waste, her people physically weakened by privations of all kinds, all transport, supplies, civil administration shattered, France, once a relatively prosperous land, is today terribly poor. Long years of effort on the part of her workers, peasants and scientists will be needed before France can be restored to prosperity, and her immediate material needs satisfied.

In the political sphere too there will be struggles ahead. The agents of the trusts, though rendered powerless for the time being, are still in some cases able to carry on their intrigues, hoping to divide the people and to return to their old position of power and privilege. Especially do they hope to play on the anti-communist prejudices which still lurk in the minds of some French people, particularly the leaders of some political parties. After the war, the French people have still to tackle the task of actually setting up a new democratic constitution, and of carrying out, in the teeth of opposition from reactionary interests throughout the world, the social reconstruction programme of the National Council of Resistance.

We in Britain, whatever sacrifices we have made during this war, have had no experience comparable to those of the French people during four years of full Nazi oppression. Therefore some of us may find it difficult to appreciate the attitude of the French towards certain questions, and all of us would be surprised if we knew the full extent of the great

political awakening which has been going on in France during these past months. Since the liberation of France, for instance, applications for membership of the trade unions have been coming in almost as fast as the presses can turn out forms.[1] And today membership of the trade unions affiliated to the C.G.T. is greater than ever before in history, greater even than at the time of the Popular Front and the stay-in-strikes of June, 1934. Similarly it was reported that in two days 1,700 people applied to join the Communist Party in the small town of Rennes, in Brittany.

There is perhaps no better description of the spirit with which France is animated than that given by Fernand Grenier in 1943—a description which holds good today and which becomes even more true with every day that passes. He wrote :

> France, engulfed in 1940, is today magnificently re-awakened. She has risen slowly up out of the abyss of disaster through the work of her immense secret army, thanks to the self-sacrifice of her underground printers, the courage of her hostages, the heroism of her franc-tireurs, the suffering of her prisoners—those of the Oflags and Stalags, as of the prisons of Vichy.
>
> This France has given proof of an extraordinary political maturity.
>
> The Frenchman of 1943 is clearly aware that he has been roundly deceived on a host of questions—notably on Munich, notably on Russia. He calls a spade a spade—and Pucheu, who is intriguing in Madrid, a criminal who has ten times deserved the supreme penalty. He goes straight to the mark. He rejects resolutely all the subtle quibblings, the obscure formulæ, the false pretexts. He has a thirst for clear ideas and precise standpoints. Two years passed in the Nazi shades have given him an immense need for light, for a light as pure as that of our Provence.

In the years ahead the French people, who have learned

[1] *Daily Herald*, 31. viii. 44.

much and who have been steeled and transformed in the struggle against the most vile and ruthless enemy they have ever faced, will light the world with their achievements and play a foremost part in the building of a new humanity.

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